

Understanding the Characteristics that Contributed to Québec Athletes' Olympic Successes  
Moving Into, During, and Out of the Olympic Games

by

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of the requirements for the degree of  
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## **Abstract**

The current study examined the characteristics that influenced four of the most successful Québec athletes' performances moving in, during, and out of the Olympic Games. Their experiences were explored using media data (i.e., newspapers articles from the province of Québec) through an inductive thematic analysis. Seven main practical conclusions were created from this study with the first five relating to the three meta-transitions explored, and the last two relating to limitations created by the methodology used in the study. The conclusions are: 1) Developing an empowering coach-athlete relationship in order to facilitate the athletes' performances, 2) Starting a competition easy to finish strong, 3) Creating realistic but challenging goals for every step of the Olympic season, 4) Consciously learning from success and failures/mistakes, 5) Using mainly intrinsic motivation when competing, 6) The unmentioned importance of sport psychology services, and 7) The omission of information about provincial versus national pride.

**Key words:** Olympic Games, elite Québec athletes, Olympic meta-transition, media data

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## **CHAPTER ONE: Introduction**

Athletes from around the world dream to represent their country at the Olympic Games. Just participating at the Olympic Games is an accomplishment for some athletes while others strive to win an Olympic medal and some of them are able to do it multiple times. Nevertheless, it is required by all athletes who desire to perform among the best in the world to put their sport at the center of their lives and demonstrate a high level of commitment towards their athletic development. Athletes commonly put their study on hold or only study part time once attaining the elite level enabling them to put all their attention on sport related preparation, especially close to major competitions such as the Olympic Games.

The Olympic Games, being the biggest sporting event worldwide, attracts media from all nations to share their athletes' achievements. Media are an important part of the Olympics as they allow to convey information about the Olympic events to the population. After their performances, athletes are expected to talk to the media, as their coverage is one of the reason why the athletes are able to get the support to participate at the Olympics. The decisions from the media about what they ask and discuss with the athletes are their own, but more importantly athletes are the ones telling their stories and deciding what they choose to share.

There is some consensus within the literature that participating at the Olympic Games and winning a medal for one's country is considered the pinnacle for amateur athletes' athletic careers (Blumenstein & Lidor, 2008; Fletcher & Sarkar, 2012; Gould & Maynard, 2009; Moyle, 2015; Schinke, Stambulova, Trépanier, & Oghene, 2015; Shannon, Gentner, Patel, & Muccio, 2012; Wylleman, Rosier, & De Knop, 2016). The Olympics being organized every four years makes this event more special as most athletes are only able to compete in one or two Olympic Games (Gould & Maynard, 2009), potentially adding pressure on the days of competition. Living



in the Olympic village also enhances the stress that the biggest sporting event already creates. The living conditions such as sharing a room with multiple teammates (Blumenstein & Lidor, 2008), the lack of sleep (Schinke et al., 2015), and the noise created by other athletes bring additional challenges to optimal sport performances (Blumenstein & Lidor, 2008). The transportation is also a burden at the Games where the extended security check-points make every move more complex (Harbel, 2007).

The best teams at the Olympics are the ones able to navigate through multiple challenges, distractions, and setbacks, maintaining focus on what they can control, and allowing their athletes to fully focus on their performances. The more athletes have qualified for the Olympics for one country also enhances its chance to rank among the best countries on the overall medal count. Canada was able to accumulated 14 gold, seven silver, and five bronze medals, being the country having won the most gold medals during the 2010 Vancouver Olympics (see Vancouver Olympics, 2017).

Québec has had a particular history within Canada, as this province has tried to separate and become its own country two times. The majority (with “No” at 50.6% in 1995) of Québec citizens voted to stay part of the Canada (Tétu de Labsade, 2001). The dynamic and culture of this province in relation to sport is embedded within this tension and thus, also interesting to study. Athletes from the province of Québec have largely contributed to winning medals at the Games. Many athletes, both from individual and team sports, have done their share in reaching the podium for Canada. According to the recent history (i.e., last 15 years) of medals won by athletes from Québec, it appears that there are specific sports in which they have harvested Olympic medals. These sports are part of both the Summer and Winter Games. One of the reasons why Québec is particularly strong in specific sports could be because of the facilities

available in the province making some sports easier to train in. However, this aspect does not fully explain the success in all the sports where Québec athletes excel. The main sports where Québec athletes excel are, among others, diving, short track speed skating, and freestyle skiing (moguls), even though other athletes from the same province have also reached the Olympic podium in other individual (e.g., snowboardcross, figure skating, swimming, taekwondo, wrestling) and team sports (e.g., rugby, hockey, soccer, rowing; see Canadian Olympic Committee, 2018). It however appears that Québec's accomplishments are more preeminent in winter sports such as mogul skiing and short track speed skating.

## **Purpose**

The purpose of this project was to examine what made four Québec Olympic medalists from winter individual sports so successful at the Olympics by looking at what impacted them and how, moving into, during, and out the Olympic Games. The purpose of this project was accomplished by selecting four elite Québec athletes who had achieved consistent success on the international scene by winning at least one Olympic medal as well as one medal in their respective World Championships, or multiple Olympic medals at two or more Olympic Games. Additionally, a focus on winter sports was chosen because of the Québec athletes' large contribution in winning medals during winter Olympics and the great ranking Canada got from it, which is not as prominent during summer Olympics. Gathering quotes from these athletes in a range of Quebec news media, the researcher's intentions were to highlight specific factors affecting Québec Olympians, determine how they impacted the athletes, and establish practical recommendations that could be used to strengthen future Québec athletes' journey to the Olympics. Those recommendations could then be shared with sport organisations such as the

*Institut National de Sport du Québec* (INS Québec; National Sport institute of Québec) with the hope of helping enhancing Québec Olympians' performances in their Olympic journey(s).

### **Significance**

This study provided in depth information about four elite Québec athletes and focused on presenting the characteristics that impacted their performances and on providing practical recommendation to support Québec athletes in their Olympic journey(s). This expanded the knowledge about Olympic performance in relation to three meta-transitions which were:

*Focused preparation for the Olympics, To the Olympic podium, and To the post-Games* (see Schinke et al., 2015). The use of already accomplished Olympians from the province of Québec ensured the identification of important factors that lead to international sport success.

Sport psychology practitioners will benefit from the knowledge gained with this study as it permitted to be aware of specific factors affecting Olympic performance that can be planned for. Additionally, this study revealed a few Québec athletes' needs when facing challenges getting to, participating at, and out of the Games. Based on the findings and recommendations of this study, sport psychology practitioners have the opportunity to adapt their services to athletes from the province of Québec helping them to perform at their best. Studying this particular province was important because its large medal contribution during winter Olympics could be enhanced which would permit Canada to stay among if not the best countries in winter Olympic Games.

The use of media data in applied sport psychology research and practice was also proven to be highly profitable, which is innovative in sport psychology, both in research and applied forms. The privileged access to athletes that journalists have during crucial moments (e.g., right after a performance at the Olympics) can serve research purposes as shown in the present study.

Researchers could never have such contact with elite athletes during major competitions.

Therefore, the use of media data in sport psychology is a considerable asset that should keep being exploited.

Additionally, targeting the best Québec performers allowed for in-depth information to be gained about what helped leading them to their success at the Olympics. Modeling from their experiences, future Olympians could have better preparation to face the Olympic Games, fostering better results. The success of the athletes in the current study thus represent additional tools for Québec and Canadian accomplishments at the Olympics.

### **Delimitations**

This project explored what factors impacted the performance of four Québec Olympic medalists achieving consistent success in major world events. Thus, only athletes born and/or raised in the province of Québec were considered in this study. This was insured by looking into the athletes' profiles on the website of their sport associations to evaluate where they had been living at a young age and when performing as international athletes. Athletes who had grown up in Québec and had participated in the Québec sport system until that point were included. This delimitation was chosen because athletes who would not have evolved in the Québec sport system would not have been exposed to the specific structure and support offered by the province of Québec. Thus, those athletes would have had different experiences that would not reflect the Québec sport experience.

The purpose of the project was to know more about the elite Québec athletes which directed the study towards studying the ones who were consistently successful. The maintenance of high level of sport performance (e.g., reaching the podium multiple time during a season) defined their eligibility to be considered in the study. Durand-Bush and Salmela's (2002) study

considered athletes included in this category as the ones who had won at least one World Championship medal and one Olympic medal. Addition, as the main focus of this study was to identify the factors influencing the performance of the best Québec, medaling at the Olympic Games was a pre-requisite to be included in the study. Athletes who had won many World Championships medals but no Olympic medals were not included in the current study.

The last criterion of eligibility was for the athletes to be practicing an individual sport. Team sports athletes were not considered in this project. This allowed a main focus on individual sports performance factors, which also correlates with my background and experience in sport. A focus on winter sports was also taken as that is where Québec finds its greatest medal contribution.

### **Operational Definitions**

**Athletic career transitions.** Stambulova and Wylleman (2013) have defined athletic career transitions as “turning phases or shifts in athletes’ development associated with a set of specific demands that athletes have to cope with in order to continue successfully in sport and/or other spheres of their life” (p. 607). It is within this perspective that the terms athletic career transition or simply transition will be used within this project.

**Cultural sport psychology.** Cultural sport psychology (CSP) reflects unique aspirations and needs stemming from culture, including race, ethnicity, gender, and geography, among other considerations (Schinke, Michel, Danielson, Gauthier, & Pickard, 2005). Research in CSP further “emphasizes an exploration of the unique point of view of cultural community members and the psychological and performance implications that result from such cultural standpoints” (Blodgett, Schinke, McGannon, & Fisher, 2014, p. 2).

**Successful Québec athletes.** The successful Québec athletes refer, in the current project, to athletes raised and/or born in Québec who medaled in at least one Olympic Games plus in at least one World Championships. Successful Québec athletes may also have won a medal in two different Olympic Games (total of at least two Olympic medals in two Olympic Games).

**Media data.** Media data refers, in relation to the current project, to Québec newspaper articles from nine specific newspapers (i.e., La Presse, Le Devoir, L'Écho de Saint-Eustache, L'Éveil, Le Nouvelliste, Le Quotidien, Le Soleil, La Tribune, and La Voix de l'Est). More precisely, the media data that was collected were articles that discussed the preparation, performance, and post-performance period of the selected athletes.

**Thematic analysis.** Braun and Clarke (2006) clearly defined what thematic analysis is. They identified that “thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organizes and describes your data set in (rich) detail” (p. 79). This is how thematic analysis was used and considered in this study. More precisely, inductive thematic analysis was used in which the codes and themes were created from the data themselves, using a bottom-up approach (see Braun & Clarke, 2012). Inductive thematic analysis was used to capture the athletes’ unique experiences at the Olympic Games.

## **CHAPTER TWO: Review of literature**

### **Overview**

The following review of literature presents the major themes addressed within this study. First, the Olympic context is described. The particularities of the Olympic Games are presented, including the magnitude of its popularity and the special dynamic and implications of staying at the Olympic village. Understanding the Olympic context is a crucial part of this study as this competition is unique and necessitates athletes to overcome various challenges to reach the podium. Second, the different characteristics and potential sources of influence that have been highlighted in the literature to affect, for the best or for the worse, athletes' performances at the Olympic Games are discussed. Third, literature about transition is presented. Specifically, as athletes continually evolve within their sport, transiting from becoming a successful Olympian from one part of their elite amateur career to the next (Stambulova, Alfermann, Statler, & Côté, 2012), appropriate transition literature permitted to further understand the implications of the different athletes' career phases. Fourth, the place of culture in sport and its significance in sport is discussed in order to contextualize Québec athletes' performances within their culture and to justify why Québec athletes were chosen. Sports are practiced and seen differently across nations and cultures, and an overview of the role of culture in relation to athletes' careers is then essential.

### **Olympic Context**

The Olympic Games are "special" in many ways (McCann, 2008; Orlick, 2002; Pensgaard & Duda, 2002). They are held only every four years, are a multisport event, involving many thousands of athletes, coaches, and support staff members, are highly mediatized with millions of spectators both present at the Games and watching on television, last over a two-

week period, and involve higher level of expectations than any other sport competition (Blumenstein & Lidor, 2008; Hodge & Hermansson, 2007; Orlick, 2002). Journalists are also abundant at the Games, where for example 10,000 journalists and media personnel came to Canada for the 2010 Winter Olympics, covering approximately 2600 athletes from around the world (Kristiansen, Hanstad, & Roberts, 2011). The number of athletes participating at the Summer Games is over four times more, totalling over 11238 athletes at the 2016 Olympics in Rio (See Rio Olympic Games). The scale of the Olympics has the potential to create intense stress for athletes, coming from endless sources, but also for coaches and support teams (Terry & Si, 2015). Even though financial rewards are not given to winners in the Games by the organizing committee (i.e., International Olympic Committee) like in other international competitions, athletes' interest in this event is still prominent, whether it is to try to win a medal or just to participate (Blumenstein & Lidor, 2007). Success at the Games can however create financial opportunities for athletes who generally get little attention else than during this event (Harbel, 2007) where the media attention could attract sponsors. Financial rewards are however usually attributed to the athletes by their country. Canadian medalists do receive a financial reward according to the type of medal won. At the Rio Olympics for example, Canadian athletes received \$20,000, \$15,000, and \$10,000 for winning gold, silver and bronze medal respectively (Canadian Olympic Committee, 2017).

Scholars have acknowledged that the Olympics Games represent the pinnacle and the most prestigious sport competition for athletes who all want to get one of the rare opportunities to represent their country in such an event (Blumenstein & Lidor, 2007, 2008; Gould & Maynard, 2009; McNeill, 2007; Moyle, 2015; Pensgaard & Duda, 2002, 2003; Schinke et al., 2015; Shannon et al, 2012; Terry & Si, 2015; Wylleman et al., 2016). Athletes have often



identified being on an Olympic podium as more valuable than other sport achievements (e.g., setting world records; McNeill, 2007). Usually, athletes need to be part of a four-year training program preparing them to the qualification process of their event(s), which involve(s) preparation in the four spheres of sport performance (i.e., physical, technical, tactical, and psychological; Blumenstein & Lidor, 2008). Everything is planned according to this four-year cycle building up to the Olympics (Moyle, 2015). An athlete's results at the Olympics has the potential to change one's life for the better after winning a gold medal, or the worse when all of what could go wrong did go wrong creating the feeling of being inadequate and leaving scars on an athlete's image (McCann, 2008; Terry & Si, 2015). Knowing the potential outcomes of the Games reinforces the internal pressure in athletes' minds (McCann, 2008).

Athletes and coaches generally stay in the Olympic Village during the Games where there is a unique atmosphere, which represents the biggest international elite athletes, coaches, and sport professionals gathering in terms of sport event (Blumenstein & Lidor, 2008). This environment brings lots of challenges and potential distractions (e.g., stressful atmosphere, lack of privacy, lack of sleep, security issues, noise from other resident in the village, and meeting international mega-star athletes, personal issues) that have the potential to undermine athletes' performances (Blumenstein & Lidor, 2008; Fletcher & Sarkar, 2012; Schinke et al., 2015). However, meticulous planning and preparation with the appropriate physical and mental training enhance the chances for athletes to adapt to challenges faced at the Games and enable them to do "many things right, on a consistent basis and in an integrated fashion" (Gould, Greenleaf, Guinan, Dieffenbach, & McCann, 2001, p. 33) leading to successful performance at the Olympic Games. Athletes use different strategies, techniques, and mental skills to augment their chances of having their best performances (Greenleaf et al., 2001), such as imagery, self-talk, process

focus, goal-setting, and relaxation (Blumenstein & Lidor, 2007; Shannon et al., 2012). Athletes are yet not immune to the “Gold Medal Fever” that could happen when feeling the pressure to reach the podium (Moyle, 2015). This phenomenon is observed when athletes bring changes to what was planned (e.g., equipment, strategies) without telling their coaches, even though they and their team have committed valuable time and energy during multiple months at establishing the best strategies and equipment for the ultimate competition. This is usually done with the hope of getting the edge to win a medal but usually results in poor performances. The Gold Medal Fever is one example of the impact that the Olympic Games can have on athletes. On the other hand, the Games can also bring out the best in athletes who accomplish magnificent performances.

Thus, the Olympic context is particular and it creates expectations and pressure not found in any other event. Those characteristics have the potential to enhance or deteriorate athletes’ performances. They will be further explained in the following section.

### **Characteristics Influencing Performance at the Olympic Games**

Multiple authors have studied Olympic performance. This section will present what researchers have identified as impacting the performance of athletes at the Olympic Games, which will permit a deeper understanding of what athletes have to face in their Olympic Journey. Studies that have looked into multiple characteristics will first be acknowledged and studies that investigated precise individual factors will follow. Many authors have looked at identifying all the characteristics influencing the performance of elite athletes at the Olympic Games. Among the earliest studies done in sport psychology were the ones conducted by Orlick and Partington (1986, 1987). The two authors first investigated the support services offered by the Canadian sport system. The most cited elements impacting the performance of the best athletes were

quality training (e.g., establish winning patterns in training, doing simulation training, imagery training, having clear daily goals) and being mentally prepared (having pre-competition plan, competition focus plan, doing an evaluation of their competition, dealing with distractions, having learned the elements of success). Additionally, not respecting the pre-established routine, having late selections, and not being able to handle the many distractions present at the Games were three elements that lead to poor performance. Gould and colleagues (e.g., Gould Dieffenbach, & Moffett, 2002a; Gould, Greenleaf, Chung, & Guinan, 2002b; Gould, Greenleaf, Guinan, & Chung, 2002c; Gould et al., 2001; Greenleaf, Gould, & Dieffenbach, 2001) have furthered Orlick and Pratington's work about Olympic performances with studies in relation to variables influencing the performances of U.S. athletes at the Olympic Games, which will be summarized in the following paragraphs. These authors have used different approaches to tackle this topic, such as interviews with athletes (Gould et al., 2001; Greenleaf et al., 2001), surveys with coaches (e.g., Gould et al., 2002c), surveys with athletes (e.g., Gould et al., 2002b), and interviews and surveys with athletes, coaches, and significant others (e.g., Gould et al., 2002a.).

Gould et al. (2001) sought to determine factors that affected either positively or negatively the preparation and performance of U.S. Olympic athletes and coaches before and during the 1996 Summer and 1998 Winter Olympic Games. The goal was to eventually share the lessons from this study with future Olympians, thus helping them in their journey to the Games. The authors administered surveys to athletes and coaches and then conducted focus-group interviews with four teams that surpassed their National Governing Body's (NGB) performance expectations and four teams that performed below expectations. The researchers also conducted individual interviews with 10 coaches from the previously mentioned teams. Finally, Gould et al. (2001) conducted eight phone interviews which included four athletes that exceeded expectations

and four who performed below the expectations. Some examples of the most frequently reported lessons learned by athletes were related to mental preparation and training (e.g., working with a sport psychology consultant, engaging in sport psychology preparation, learning what to expect at the Games), optimal physical preparation (e.g., need to train hard while not overtraining), coaching (e.g., having good communication, honesty), distraction preparation and awareness (e.g., be ready to face all the distractions, minimize non-essential meetings), and living in the Olympic village (e.g., choosing to live in or out the village). The less successful teams or individuals had issues with one or more of these lessons, where for example, one team wanted to have a physical edge over the other teams but the athletes ended up overtraining, resulting in poor performance, and other teams appeared to be caught up in the Olympic village atmosphere which disturbed the athletes' focus needed to reach the podium.

Another study (Gould et al., 2002a) explored psychological characteristics as well as their development within a sample of U.S. Olympic champions cumulating together 32 Olympic medals. These 10 athletes, plus one of their coaches and a significant other (e.g., parent, partner, or sibling) were interviewed, totaling 30 interviews. The athletes also completed multiple psychological inventories including the Sport Anxiety Scale, the Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale, and the Athletic Coping Skills Inventory–28. The results suggested that these Olympic champions were characterized by having high levels of confidence, resilience, and mental toughness, as well as good coping skills, high dispositional optimism, adaptive perfectionism, and hope. The athletes were moreover able to block distractions, had high levels of competitiveness, work ethic, and sport intelligence. These champions also extensively used goal setting and were reported as being able to achieve the goal they had set. The resulting psychological skills possessed by the athletes were put under seven umbrella categories: general

personality characteristics and values, performance enhancement skills and characteristics, motivational issues and orientations, overall handling of adversity and pressure, psychological characteristics to overcome, good morals/sportspersonship, and self-awareness. The identified specific skills included having high level of confidence, mental toughness/resiliency, sport intelligence, competitiveness, dispositional hope, optimism, and adaptive perfectionism, ability to focus, block out distractions, cope with and control anxiety, set and achieve goals, and having a hard-work ethic. The results on the psychological inventories suggested that these successful U.S. athletes scored high on confidence, goal setting and mental preparation, concentration/focus, freedom from worry, relaxation, emotional control, and activation. Gould et al. (2002a) also highlighted that the participants scored moderate on perfectionism within which they scored high on personal standards and organization, but had low scores on parental expectation and criticism, doubts about action and concerns over mistakes, which, the authors mentioned reflects adaptive behaviours that would be expected from these high level athletes.

Gould and Maynard (2009) conducted a review of literature on psychological preparation for the Olympic Games. The authors presented recommendations to help direct the preparation for a successful participation at the Olympics. Their suggestions touched on multiple physical, social, and situational factors (i.e., preparation for distractions, plans and adherence to plans, optimal physical training, mental preparation, self- and team-confidence, team cohesion and harmony, coaching, support personnel, team training/residency programmes, family/friends, media, sponsors, international competitions, team selection and trials, weather conditions, equipment concerns, travel factors, team factors, environmental influences, mental training and sport psychology) revealing the complexity behind performing to one's full potential at the Olympic Games.

McNeill (2007) summarized the main profile of elite athletes as having specific characteristics, namely high levels of confidence, commitment, determination, focus, attention, resiliency, and self-regulation of arousal, high quality training, ability to efficiently cope with distractions, control anxiety, and daily goal setting. McNeil also acknowledged the presence of individual characteristics as impacting athletes and their performances.

Taylor, Gould, and Rolo (2008) conducted a study where they used the Test of Performance Strategies (TOPS), measuring eight psychological skills (i.e., goal-setting, relaxation, activation, imagery, self-talk, attentional control, emotional control, and automaticity). These measures were used with 176 US athletes from the 2000 Olympics. The results suggested that medalists had higher levels of emotional control and automaticity and lower level of negative thinking than non-medalist athletes.

Many studies have looked in depth at specific characteristics providing additional knowledge and understandings about their potential repercussions on athletes during international competitions. The following section presents the main aforementioned characteristics that potentially impact athletes' performances at the Games, but from studies that have looked at them with a narrower lens.

Jones, Hanton, and Connaughton (2002) interviewed 10 international performers in either one-on-one interviews or focus group to discuss the definition of mental toughness and the attributes that would be part of the most mentally tough performers, based upon the participants' individually rated definitions and mental toughness attributes. The authors identified a definition of mental toughness as either being naturally present or inculcated in athletes allowing them to better cope than opponents in relation to the various demands that their sport put on them, permitting these athletes to stay determined, confident, and focused, giving them consistency in

their performance (Jones et al., 2002). The 12 attributes related to mentally tough performers were linked to self-belief and confidence, resiliency, motivation and desire to succeed, focus during performance, dealing with distractions, and coping skills (Jones et al., 2002). Jones, Hanton, and Connaughton (2007) conducted another study complementing the previous one, in which focus groups and individual interviews were undertaken with eight elite' athletes (i.e., athletes having won at least a gold medal at the Olympic Games or World Championships), three coaches, and four sport psychologists who worked with Olympic or World champions. This group of participants identified 30 attributes of mental toughness, 18 more than identified by Jones et al. (2002). The resulting framework created from the participants' answers included four dimensions: attitude/mindset (belief and capacity to focus), training (using long-term goals as the source of motivation, controlling the environment, and pushing oneself to the limit), competition (belief, ability to stay focused, regulating performance, handling pressure, awareness and control of thoughts and feelings, and controlling the environment), and post-competition (handling failure and handling success). Overall, mentally tough athletes were described as staying motivated by fixing long-term goals and working towards them with patience, discipline, and self-control, using every aspect of their hard training environment to their advantage, as well as taking control rather than being controlled.

Summarily, the studies on mental toughness suggested that its attributes include other core aspects of successful performances. These aspects were confidence, resiliency and coping skills, and focus, which are presented below. As these aspects of mental toughness might be found as important contributors to sport achievements, it is worth describing them individually.

The role of confidence in sport performance has been researched by many authors. Studies done by Jones and his colleagues (2002, 2007) suggested that athletes' confidence may

come from past experiences and accomplishments, as well as from all the work that has been done in their journey to reaching the elite level. The achievement of successful performances was also attributed to believing in one's self potential and having an inner arrogance, which were both associated with augmenting athlete's confidence (Jones et al, 2007). Another way to feel confident was to keep as much control over the environment as possible so athletes can shape their destiny without relying on others (e.g. coaches) to do what they described as their work (Jones et al., 2007). Mentally tough athletes also were also identified as having high levels of confidence, knowing that they have the potential to raise their performance level when needed and to push their limits (Jones et al., 2007). Hays, Maynard, Thomas, and Bawden (2007), identified that few sport scholars have looked in depth at confidence in elite athletes. Hays et al. (2007) explored the topic of confidence in sport by evaluating the multiple sources and types of confidence among World Class athletes. Their findings supported the view of sport confidence as a multi-dimensional construct. The results coming from the analysis of the semi-structured interviews of seven males and seven females, including two team sport and 14 individual sport athletes highlighted nine sources of confidence. The most salient of these appeared to be coming from having a good physical preparation, having had good performances in previous competitions, receiving social support from their coaches (mainly mentioned by female athletes) and believing in the coach's ability to create a proper training program (mainly mentioned by male athletes). The types of confidence identified by the athletes were the belief in their ability to accomplish specific skills, belief in their ability to produce certain outcomes, and confidence about physical attributes and psychological factors.

The resiliency and coping skills that mentally tough athletes demonstrate were said to be partly explained by their increased determination to achieve high levels of success, which help



them bouncing back from challenges and allow them to adapt and cope with a variety of unplanned situation (Jones et al., 2002). Their adaptability skills permitted them to feel at their top under any circumstances and to not only face challenges, but work through any obstacles in their way (Jones et al., 2007). Mentally tough athletes used the environmental challenges to their advantages and would get the job done even in poor weather, for example (Jones et al., 2007). Adding to the athletes' resiliency were having the belief that they would eventually achieve their goals, because of their belief that challenges are just momentary before success is attained (Jones et al., 2002, 2007). Their focus on control skills also permits mentally tough athletes to let go of mistakes and quickly regain composure (Jones et al., 2002, 2007). Mentally tough athletes are not only great at coping, but enjoy the pressure from major competitions (e.g., Olympic Games), and enjoy the process rather than just fighting through it (Jones et al., 2007). These coping skills permit such athletes to perform at the highest level under any conditions (e.g., weather), distractions (pressure, expectations), and unpredictable situations, allowing these people to channel anxiety, permitting great decision making at key moments (Jones et al., 2007). These athletes also accept that a certain level of anxiety cannot be avoided, but they know that they can deal with it (Jones et al., 2002). Mentally tough athletes' coping skills are also evidenced through their ability to control unproductive thoughts and feelings, which help maximizing their performances (Jones et al., 2007). Gould and Maynard (2009), in their review of literature, highlighted that coping effectiveness was akin to emotion control which appeared to predict competitions results. The authors added that coping skills are even more crucial because most Olympians will participate in only one or two Olympic Games, enhancing the pressure on athletes to want to perform at their best, that the stress experienced by Olympians comes from both performance and non-performance sources and is affected by situational and personal

factors. Pensgaard and Roberts (2000) explored the sources of stress experienced by Olympians while Pensgaard and Duda (2003) investigated the categories of stress experienced by Olympians. The identified sources of stress were cognitive distress (uncertainty and dissociative thoughts), coach and team distress (problem with the coach, lack of support from the team), media distress, and disappointment (fear of disappointing others and of not meeting expectations). The level of stress experienced by Winter Olympians was found to be affected by the perceived motivational climate. When athletes perceived the climate as being placed on competition and social evaluation, they experienced more stress related to cognitive, coach, and team factors. The categories of stress highlighted by Pensgaard and Duda (2003) were in relation to performance, psycho-social factors, external factors, and injuries. They explored the relationship between task and ego orientations and the use of coping strategies among athletes having participated in the 1994 Winter Olympic Games. Athletes with high task/low ego orientation were akin to the use of active coping and social emotional support, and athletes with low task/high ego orientation were associated to the use of positive redefinition and growth strategies. The most often used coping strategies were active coping, planning, acceptance and redefinition, and growth coping strategies. Gould and Maynard (2009) concluded their segment about coping skills by saying that successful performances can be fostered by optimizing athletes' emotions as functional and being able to regulate those specific emotions using various coping strategies.

The ability to focus is another well explored factor in sport performance. Mentally tough athletes are also described by their ability to focus, where such athletes prioritize long-term goals over any short-term benefit (Jones et al., 2007). The achievement of long-term goals requires mentally tough athletes to prioritize their sport over everything, making it the biggest priority in

their life (Jones et al., 2007). These athletes master their ability to switch their focus between sport and personal life and find the right balance for them (Jones et al., 2002, 2007). The mentally tough athletes can stay focused on the task at hand no matter the distractions, rather than on the outcome, using the set goals to remind themselves why they are there doing what they are doing (Jones et al., 2007). They do not get affected by others' performances (good or bad) (Jones et al., 2002). Personal life distractions are also dealt with and do not affect the focus of mentally tough athletes (Jones et al., 2002). Finally, these athletes have the ability to focus when it counts and seize the opportunity when it is the most important. The focus on task has also been highlighted as being present for U.S. Olympic gold medalist (Shannon et al., 2012).

The coach-athlete relationship has been highlighted as being important in sport performance. For example, coaches are also “performing” at the Olympics, and their performances have the potential to impact the athletes they work with (Gould et al., 2002c). Coach-athlete relationships have been identified as involving similar characteristics present in friendship and work relations (Jowett, 2005). In other words, coach-athlete relationships are fundamental in the process of coaching, determining athletes' fulfilment, self-esteem, as well as performance achievement, emphasising that such relationships go beyond teaching skills and strategies and include trust and support (Jowell & Cockerill, 2003). The latter authors further supported that coach-athlete relationships can translate as a source of stress and distraction, when not optimal. Jowett (2005) stressed that the coach-athlete relationship in itself is instrumental as it can provide a source of support during difficult times, emotional crises, and transitions. Jowett added that effective coach-athlete relationships are holistic, where the focus is placed on general positive growth as an athlete, coach, and person, as they are defined by “empathic understanding, honesty, support, mutual liking, acceptance, responsiveness, friendliness, co-operation, caring,

respect, and positive regard” (p. 14). Successful coach-athlete relationships were defined as the ones that have led athletes to achieve normative performance successes such as winning a gold medal in World Championships. Jowett (2005) highlighted coach-athlete relationships can be successful and effective (best outcome), successful and ineffective (viewed as exploitative and abusive), effective and unsuccessful (viewed as bringing positive outcomes for the dyad in terms of psychological health and well-being, but not in terms of performance). Coaches may take decisions that are detrimental for athletes which makes the former becoming a critical source of stress, rather than a source of support (Pensgaard, 2008). Olusoga, Maynard, Hays, and Butt (2012) used interviews with eight coaches from a British Olympic team to explore the factors allowing the coaches to do an effective job at the Olympics. The factors identified included psychological attributes (e.g., emotional control, being confident), preparation (having clear goals and roles), and coping efficiently at the Games (e.g., good support staff dynamic). The results from Olusoga et al.’s study suggest that coaches should be mindful of the ways they respond to stressors and they might impact the athletes they work with. Gould et al. (2002c) also explored that variables perceived to have influenced high level coach effectiveness at the 1996 Atlanta and 1998 Nagano Olympic Games. The results of their study suggested that coaches who drastically changed their coaching behaviours were not able to create a climate of trust with their athletes, were not able to manage crisis situations, and perceived that they performed poorly. However, other coaches perceived their coaching performance as optimal when they were able to establish trustful relationships with their athletes, stay cool under pressure and create and function in a positive environment.

Mental health is another topic that has been explored more in depth in the recent years. High level athletes have been identified as a population at risk for mental disorders such as

burnout and eating disorders (Hughes & Leavy, 2012). Mental health problems can be associated to sport engagement (e.g., concussion, overtraining, crisis transitions) and competition factors (e.g., training, preparation, and recovery routines; Schinke et al., 2017). Performance issues faced by athletes may come from different aspects such as competition over-load, inefficient training, under-recovery, and poor balance in athletes' life (Schinke et al, 2017). Other reasons explaining athletes' vulnerability to mental illness are the lack of personal autonomy, disempowerment, injuries, competitive failure, aging and retirement (Hughes & Leavy, 2012). The World Health Organization (2017) defined health as well-being within three spheres (i.e., physical, mental, and social). Schinke, Stambulova, Si, and Moore (2017) suggested that this holistic way of defining health combines mental and physical health because they are interconnected. The latter authors further discussed the relationship between mental and physical health. Indeed, sport related physical challenges (e.g., intense training, sport injury) experienced by athletes can lead to psychological consequences akin to cognitive, emotional, and behavioural issues. The opposite also happens where psychological challenges (e.g., relational problems, anxiety, depression) negatively impact physical well-being (Schinke et al., 2017).

Mental health has been suggested to be a continuum, instead of seeing things as black or white (having or not a disease or disordered state). This continuum starts on one end delineating high-functioning individuals' daily activities not being impacted by negative psychological states (peak potential, flow, or zone of states; Schinke et al., 2017). The other end characterizes low-functioning individuals' daily activities being impacted by negative psychological, emotional, or behavioural characteristics (active mental illness), with other categories in between such as sub-syndromal illness, normal, and good mental health in between (Schinke et al., 2017). This continuum based model highlights that there are different degrees or levels of psychological

wellness/distress, which can influence athletes for better or worse. The highest rate of mental disorders would be linked to elite athletes' peak competitive years because it represents the highest level of demands (physical and mental) exerted on them (Schinke et al., 2017). Even though Olympic athletes might not be diagnosed with mental health issue, they could experience other level of mental disorders. Prevention in that domain has to be done to ensure Olympians' mental health to be optimal.

The coach-athlete relationship has been identified as having the potential to influence athletes' mental health. Indeed, an effective coach-athlete relationship can reinforce psychological health as well as create a sense of well-being (Jowett, 2005). Moreover, successful athletes have been identified to have more positive mental health than less successful athletes (Shannon et al., 2012). The prevalence of mental health issues among elite athletes appears to be quite important. Hammond, Gialloreti, Kubas, and (Hap) Davis (2013) presented that 68% of their sample involving Canadian international-level university swimmers were identified as experiencing major depression incidents prior to competition, and 34% of them post-competition. The authors also found that female athletes tended to experience more depression than male athletes, and that the most elite athletes also experienced more depression than lower level athletes. Other factors also augmenting the risk of common mental disorder have been established among Dutch elite athletes. These included frequent past surgery and life events, prominent career dissatisfaction, and lack of social support (Gouttebarga et al., 2017). Again, the mental health issues seen among international level athletes are similar to what Olympians can experience, which explains why this aspect was found as potentially impacting Olympic athletes and their performances.

Presently, the main psychological interventions and trainings to help athletes deal with stress, strengthen general well-being, lessen subclinical and clinical conditions, and optimize performance efforts are based on mindfulness and resilience (Schinke et al., 2017). Other work could also be done in educating athletes and coaches towards facing stigmatization of mental health (Schinke et al., 2017).

Thus, multiple factors can impact athletes at the Olympics. The best athletes are the ones who can efficiently deal with them and become stronger physically and mentally. The aforementioned characteristics impact athletes in different ways depending of the stages they are at in their career. Transiting from one stage to another represent the adaptation and challenging periods, which are described below.

### **Transitions**

Wylleman et al. (2004) defined a transition as a mix of events that bring someone a change in their self-perception and in social relationships that is beyond everyday life changes. Career transitions in sport have been defined as “turning phases or shifts in athletes’ development associated with a set of specific demands that athletes have to cope with in order to continue successfully in sport and/or other spheres of their life” (Stambulova & Wylleman, 2013, p. 607). Transitions may come from any sphere of life, being athletic or not, suggesting transitions in the athletes’ athletic life as well as, at the same time or not, transitions in their personal and social life (Wylleman, Rosier, & De Knop, 2015). What follows is the explanation of the different types of transitions and the ones for athletes in the Olympic context.

**Types of transitions.** Three different types of transitions exist which are the normative, non-normative, and quasi-normative transitions. The normative transition is one where an athlete naturally goes from one stage to another naturally, making it usually predictable and anticipated

(Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). This type of transition can be link to athletes' athletic or non-athletic life. The non-athletic normative transitions related to the individual's growth is defined by age, biological, social, and emotional events or changes (e.g., academic or financial transitions), while on the athletic side, normative transitions are defined by the athletic development, such as transiting from junior to senior, or from regional to national-level (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004; Wylleman, et al., 2015). The second type of transitions reflect the non-normative transitions. This type of transitions happens unexpectedly or without usual process, and results from specific events happening in an athlete's life (e.g., season-ending injury, loss of a coach, losing a role on the team; Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). Non-normative transitions are usually unpredicted, unanticipated, and involuntary (Wylleman et al., 2004). This category also includes non-transitions which are transitions that are expected to occur but that do not happen (Wylleman et al., 2015). The third type of transitions represents quasi-normative transitions. Quasi-normative transitions can only be predicted for a certain group (Hendry & Kloep, 2002; Schinke et al., 2017), meaning that it is possible to plan this transition ahead of time for specific elite athletes at a specific level. An example of quasi-transition is the one of participating at the Olympic Games. It is hard to predict who will participate, but certain athletes are usually identified by their NGB as having the potential to reach the Olympic Games and these athletes, once qualified, undergo such a transition.

Stambulova (2016) discussed the new research trends about athletes' transitions. These included: (a) cultural, (b) transitions to elite residential training centers, and (c) Olympic Games or other important competitions as career transitions. The Olympic transition has been explored in depth by Schinke et al. (2015) who presented the Olympic experience and meta-transitions in relation to the Canadian National Boxing Team. The authors supported that athletes'



participation at the Olympic Games is seen as an important transition that modifies one's expectations about life in general thus affecting this person's behaviours and social interactions. Other authors (e.g., Wylleman et al., 2015) supported the importance of this transition as Olympians, especially first-timers, face new demands and challenges that necessitate coping skills leading to either a successful or crisis-transition.

**Transition for Olympic athletes.** The transition to becoming an Olympian necessitates substantial coping strategies (Schinke et al., 2015) to be able to face the challenges athletes will have to overcome during their Olympic Games journey. Such a transition (i.e., becoming an Olympic athlete) cannot be predicted for the majority of athletes, but can be predicted for specific athletes identified by one's NGB as having the potential to be part of the Olympic team (Schinke et al., 2015). This refers, as previously mentioned, to a quasi-normative transition. Recent transition literature moreover suggested that transitions can be divided into smaller phases (Stambulova & Wylleman, 2014). Stambulova et al. (2012) looked into five different phases in the Olympic cycle (i.e., preliminary/basic preparation, selection for the Olympic Team, Olympic Season, the Olympic Games, the post-Games). Similarly, Schinke et al. (2015) named 'meta-transitions' the different phases in the Olympic cycle in their sport psychology support program to the Canadian National Boxing Team. The current project explored the last three meta-transitions out of the six identified by Schinke et al.'s (2015), namely: *Focused preparation for the Olympics*, *To the Olympic podium*, and *To the post-Games*.

The three meta-transitions will now be explained in greater details, as together they represent the different parts of the performance at the most prestigious and demanding sport competition (i.e., Olympic Games). Once qualified for the Olympics, what is done in preparation for the Games can strengthen athletes or could play against them (e.g., overtraining leading to

injuries). The actual performances reveal athletes' readiness and the ways the outcome is dealt with also impact athletes' ability to reproduce, improve, and change the approach taken towards the Games. The current study looked at athletes who have achieved international success on a constant basis (i.e., at least one Olympic and World Championship medal), which means that the three chosen meta-transitions need to be explored to permit an understanding of the characteristics that impacted the athletes' performances within their Olympic journey(s). Additionally, the ways athletes transitioned from one meta-transition to another directly influences the quality of their performance, which justifies the need to explore the meta-transitions and the challenges found within them. The ways the aforementioned characteristics previously highlighted have impacted athletes will further be described in relation to each meta-transition.

***Focused preparation for the Olympics.*** Once qualified for the Olympic Games, athletes face new challenges such as additional media attention and expectations from others adding to personal stress (Schinke et al., 2015). These have to be addressed by the team and/or sport psychology practitioner to help athletes be optimally prepared. Additional training load, an increase in frequency of training, feeling more pressure from media and public attention to perform well, and decreased contact with family and peers might also be experienced once qualified for the Olympics (Wylleman, Reints, & Van Aken, 2012), which could expose athletes to higher risks of developing mental health concerns. Other aspects of preparation include the development of and personal adaptation to coping skills, establishing a flexible pre-competition and pre-performance routine (being potentially altered by longer security lines, tight warm-up space, for example), understanding the context of the Olympics, and providing a personal meaning to the Games. Again, a focus on confidence enhancement is suggested by Schinke et al.

(2015) prior to the Games, by reconsidering the patterns and practices that have worked best for athletes.

Jones et al.'s (2007) framework of mental toughness does not have a specific dimension for the pre-Olympic preparation, but rather for general training. However, the attributes associated to this dimension can apply to the transition *Focused preparation for the Olympics* as it is a period of intense training specific to the Games. Jones et al. (2007) identified six attributes in this dimension separated in three subcomponents (i.e., using long-term goals as the source of motivation, controlling the environment, and pushing oneself to the limit). The notable attributes relate to the patience, discipline, and self-control the athletes demonstrated over their journey to being on an Olympic team. Such qualities still have to be exhibited in athletes' preparation for the Olympics. Mentally tough athletes set realistic goals and the ones who aim for winning an Olympic medal know that it is attainable. Those athletes have identified where they can improve their performance in order to reach the podium. Mentally tough performers also keep as much control over their training environment as possible so that they can decide for themselves and be the ones in charge. Mental toughness also permits athletes to overcome challenges in training and use those challenges to their advantage and enhance their performances. They also find enjoyment rather than just go through the parts of training that hurt when they push themselves to their limits. Mentally tough athletes are also very competitive and want to win and beat other people in trainings. In relation to the focused preparation for the Olympics, however, mentally tough athletes know when to push to the limits and when not to "bottom" themselves.

Once selected for the Olympics, athletes often see their family/peers/partner considerably less often (Wylleman et al., 2012), which may lead to lower levels of social support that could

impact athletes' mental well-being. The ways athletes will respond and interpret the demands and environmental stimuli will dictate their psychological state (Schinke et al., 2017).

The preparation for the Olympics necessitated coaches to take a strategic approach in establishing clear goals, roles and responsibilities among the team, keep a healthy lifestyle, and offer more support to athletes (Olusoga et al, 2012). Being clear about goals, roles and responsibilities will permit everyone on the team to understand how the coaches will function at the Games. Finally, because of the extraordinary demands coming from the upcoming Olympic context, coaches will sometimes do more for the athletes to ease their life, removing pressure from their shoulders permitting to focus on what is important for them.

Learning more about the different ways that the best Québec Olympians got prepared for the Olympics shed some light on processes or characteristics that should be emphasized with future Olympians after their qualification. This information provided the development of tools that could help other Québec Olympians.

***To the Olympic podium.*** This meta-transition represent the Olympic Games participation. Once on-site, athletes often experience high level of stress throughout the competition (Schinke et al, 2015). The coping skills developed over many years and refined and augmented during the preparation phase will be push to the limits in this meta-transition. The presence of environmental distractions such as excessive noise, media requests at inopportune times, and logistic problems, will also challenge athletes starting from day one on the Olympic site (Schinke et al., 2015). Blumenstein and Lidor (2008) highlighted the first challenges athletes face at the Olympics, which included high the level of enthusiasm and motivation to reach the second round and lack of familiarity with the competitive environment. Additionally, reaching the Olympic

podium necessitates the ability to focus and refocus between successful and less successful performances (Schinke et al., 2015).

Mental toughness appears to be crucial during important competitions such as the Olympic Games. Athletes face additional pressure and stress that are not necessarily present in training, coming from elements such as worrying if all their efforts will pay off, worrying about life after sport, incredible amounts of media coverage, living in the Olympic village, transportation and security inconveniences, interpersonal conflict, and poor first performance (Hodge & Hermansson, 2007). Athletes who have developed enjoyment towards the pressure the competition creates rather than just wanting to get it over with have better chance of success (Jones et al., 2007). The ability to focus and refocus is crucial for optimal performances to overcome the distractions, difficult conditions, or mistakes committed (Jones et al., 2007). Athletes must believe in themselves. Believing that they possess unique qualities making them better than their opponents is also useful in competition (Jones et al., 2002) where it could augment their efforts until victory is attained. Athletes' self-confidence during the preparation for the Olympics might help in training to develop and execute specific skills or strategies that will later be used during the actual competition. Even though the confidence has been noted to vary during the Olympics (Pensgaard & Duda, 2002), a higher level of confidence at opportune moments is key to fostering peak performances. Shannon et al. (2012) suggested that Olympic gold medalists used both imagery and self-talk during the Games to enhance their confidence level and foster better performances. Athletes have better chances to win when they efficiently use their coping skills, are committed to try everything until there is no more chance to win, and are focused on the task at hand (Jones et al., 2007). Athletes also have to cope with intrusive

media questioning in between performance as this has the potential to distract athletes' preparation for their events (Kristiansen et al., 2011).

Interpersonal conflicts are inevitable at the Games where the stressful conditions can lead athletes and coaches to a lack of or poor communication, tolerance and empathy (Hodge & Hermansson, 2007). Other factors helping coaches to be effective at the Games identified by Olusoga et al. (2012) are to be confident, and communicate effectively. Not getting emotionally involved in crisis time and staying calm and composed was shown to foster good interactions, while showing confidence made athletes believe in and follow the coaches' guidance. Lastly, communicating effectively at the Games is crucial, such as knowing what to say when, as well as adapting the ways of communicating to the athletes to ensure the message is understood. Gould et al. (2002c) also suggested that being trusted and credible with the athletes, keeping composure under pressure, making crucial but fair decisions, and having a positive environment were all variables fostering coaches' effectiveness.

A successful performance necessitates the interaction of multiple processes (i.e., cognitive, affective, physiological, and behavioural; Schinke et al., 2017). Athletes' mental health can be affected by different elements like athletes' frustration tolerance where the ones with low level of tolerance to frustration might not achieve personal and team goals. The lack of social support because of the difficult access to family and friends at or out of the Olympic village (Wylleman et al., 2012) may further impact athletes' mental health. Athletes' having difficulties managing their emotions can also face challenges in performance and may need appropriate psychological interventions (Schinke et al., 2017). The changes in physical and technical preparation, training routine, the jetlag, and the climate change that Olympic athletes

experience at the Games can further impact their mental functioning because of the tiredness it creates (Wylleman et al., 2012).

Exploring what characteristics impact the best Québec athletes at the Olympics was definitely valuable. Being able to make such a discovery definitely had the potential to provide useful information to Québec elite athletes who could use it to enhance their performances in major competitions by preparing better and using specific strategies proven to work.

***To the post-Games.*** Schinke et al. (2015) suggested this meta-transition as being the period of analysis. More specifically, self-analysis can be done by athletes with the help of support staff to identify the overall Olympic experience, the lessons learned, and planning for the future, all of which can help establishing a strategic plan for the following Olympic cycle. The other part of this meta-transition relates to the athletes' next goals, whether it be related or not to sport. The athletes have to choose to either continue in sport or pursue a new career. In the context of medal winning athletes, this transition happens at different times depending of the sport they practice and the Olympic schedule. The different pathways for such athletes are to become professionals (e.g., boxers; Schinke et al., 2015), take a break and/or try new performance approaches and enter the next Olympic cycle (Moyle, 2015; Schinke et al., 2015), or retire from the athletic life and shift towards other goals (Schinke et al., 2015).

Mental toughness finds its purpose in the post-Games context as athletes have to deal either with what they and others consider as successes and failures (Jones et al., 2007). Mentally tough athletes deal in more effective ways with failure, recognizing, rationalizing and learning from their failure experiences to understand what they have to do differently to achieve success in the future. Mental toughness can also be a source of empowerment where mentally tough athletes facing deception use their failures experiences as a source of motivation and raise their

performance level for the next competitions. On the other hand, those athletes facing success will be able to manage and know when to celebrate, how long they can enjoy the glory of their achievement, and when it is time to focus on the next objective. The pressure attached to success is also handled well by athletes who have strong coping skills and can deal with the additional pressures and expectations success adds on their future performances.

The post-Games period includes the athletes having to “start recovering from the extreme emotional, physical, and psychological efforts they had invested during the Olympics” (Blumenstein & Lidor, 2008, p. 298). The free-time or break of training following the Olympics permits athletes to enjoy more time with family and friends (Wylleman et al., 2012), which offers more social support leading to possible higher level of mental health and effective recovery. Getting knowledge about the post-Games characteristics is the final stage of this study. The post-Game period represents another important step in athletes’ career because a successful post-Games transition would lead to a good start in the next Olympic cycle, which would create better chance of future successful performances.

The aforementioned meta-transitions cover the main aspects related to participating at the Olympic Games. Looking at those with the specific targeted population (i.e., Québec Olympic medalists) offers an opportunity to identify along the different steps leading to, during, and after the Olympics, what characteristics influenced their preparation, performances, and recovery and how the athletes were impacted.

### **Culture and Athletes’ Careers: Reasons to study a subculture**

Modern sport is a cultural phenomenon where athletes’ development and athletic careers are directed by the sociocultural and historical contexts (Stambulova, Johnson, & Stambulov, 2009). Ryba and Stambulova (2013) argued that athletes’ development happens in a socially and



culturally constructed context and that culture not only influences athletes' careers but constitutes and situates them into the socio-political field, where languages and cultural practices shape the ways people live as well as suggest meaning for experiences in specific contexts. Other authors reinforced this statement by saying that cultures "co-exist and are constantly being made and unmade, refined and solidified by humans, who are also products of those same cultures" (Ryba & Stambulova, 2013, p. 17), which makes the consideration of culture in social sciences necessary.

The support to talented athletes differs between cultures and countries (Stambulova & Ryba, 2013), which inevitably impacts athletes' performances in various ways and in various meta-transitions. The factors influencing athletes' performances and the types of support provided vary according to the culture. For example, multiple sport psychology practitioners from different countries and cultures presented different case studies (Russian case, Swedish case, and Swedish-Russian case) and thereafter shared their thoughts on the cases according to their personal culture (Stambulova et al., 2009). This book chapter interestingly revealed how specific issues found in one culture may not be present in another one, and that the approaches taken by sport psychology practitioners differ according to their cultural background. Stambulova et al. (2009) provided an example of a Russian case where an athlete and a coach got into a fight during a selection for the European Championships, in part because of the strong competition present between the athletes and between the coaches. The Swedish consultant, sharing his reflection on the case mentioned that it was uncommon to see such competition in his culture. This example illustrates the potential impact of culture in sport and sport performances.

Cultural sport psychology's (CSP) main principle is that culture and history influence people's fluid psychological nature, where meanings are extracted and constructed through "the

cultural symbolic systems of linguistic, discursive and material practices” (Ryba, Schinke, & Stambulova, 2012, p. 152). Thus, social norms and culture have to be understood to be able to understand athletes’ behaviors and mental states (Krane & Baird, 2005), which also relates to Schinke and Stambulova’s (2017) context-driven sport psychology practice, where the understanding of the specific context in which athletes evolve has to be considered for providing personalized and effective sport psychology services. Stambulova (2016), in her overview of athletes transitions in sport and life, called for, among other suggestions, the need to have a holistic view of athletes which also considers non-athletic aspects, and the need to consider athletes’ culture as well as researchers’ own culture using reflexivity to produce quality and adapted research. These two elements were considered in this research.

The reasons to study Québec athletes also include that this province has been exemplary at producing successful winter Olympians. Thus, one objective of the current study is to explore what exactly do the athletes from the province of Québec do throughout the three meta-transitions. The Québec winter athletes’ incredible level of success represents one of the reason why they were studied.

### **Media data in sport psychology**

Media have been mainly approached within the realm of sport psychology as either “representations about the corporations and institutions that produce them” (Sparkes & Smith, 2014, p. 109) which corresponds to a social constructionist epistemological approach, or as “constructions in their own right” (Sparkes & Smith, 2014, p. 109) which aligns with a post positivist epistemology.

Previous literature related to media and sports includes research framed within a relativist ontology and social constructionist epistemology, which means that what is shared in the media

is a construction from the media where language creates rather than reflects reality (see McGannon, Gonsalves, Schinke, & Busanich, 2015; McGannon & McMahon, 2016), referring to a critical approach to qualitative study (see Terry, Hayfield, Clarke, & Braun, 2017). From a social constructionist perspective, media is viewed as an experience that is mediated which impact the people interacting with the media by creating norms of what is normal or deviant (see Millington & Wilson, 2016). Aligned with this perspective, media is studied by exploring the media reproduction, representation, or consumption (Millington & Wilson, 2016). For example, McGannon, Curtin, Schinke, and Schweinbenz (2012) looked at one athlete – Paula Radcliffe – and how the media constructed particular narratives to frame athlete and mother identities. These cultural narratives were then links to expectations that athletes are held to which impact training and experiences in positive and negative ways. This work is an example of social constructionist work because it views the media as a cultural site that circulates particular stories which frame and form identities – the media does not reflect ‘real’ or actual identities within the person per se.

A second use of media data in sport psychology is within a realist ontology and post-positivist epistemology which means that what is shared by the media represents the reality of the ones who shared their stories, referring to the experiential approach to qualitative research (see Terry et al., 2017). From a post-positivist point of view, media are viewed as giving access to people’s experiences sharing the reality and experiences of the ones interviewed. Media can thus be used as sources of data representing the interviewees’ experiences. For example, interviews with athletes shared in the media permit to access their experiences where their words can be indicators of challenges they faced and mental skills they used to overcome them. A realist ontology grounds media works in post-positivism which is the approach underpinning the use of the media in the current study. Many studies using media data were framed this way in

sport psychology (see Battocchio et al., 2013; Schinke, Bonhomme, McGannon, & Cummings, 2012a; Schinke et al., 2008; Slater, Barker, Coffee, & Jones, 2015) which supports the usefulness of this approach. A great example of the use of media data framed in a post-positivist approach is the study by Schinke et al. (2012a) who used media data (i.e., verbatim transcriptions of documentary episodes of the Showtime Super Six Boxing Classic) to explore the adaptation and mal-adaptation processes of the participants. The boxers' words and narratives were considered as representing their realities and experiences throughout the boxing tournament which permitted the identification of adaptation processes used by the six included boxers. Media data was approached with the same perspective in the current study where the Québec newspaper articles sharing the Olympic athletes' words represented their experiences and reality about what impacted their Olympic journey(s), from which conclusions were drawn.

### **The Uncharted**

What is left uncharted is the exploration of factors affecting Olympic preparation, performance, and post-performance periods of athletes from a specific subculture, such as Québec athletes who evolve in a francophone environment within a majority of Canadian anglophones. This subculture is interesting to study because of its history as well as differences with the rest of Canada. First, Québec has French as only official language making it different from all other provinces. This can impact the development of Québec athletes when they are part of national team where English may be the mainly used language to accommodate the majority of anglophone athletes. Indeed, services provided by the national sport organizations have an history of being mainly offered in English which made the relationships with those organisations challenging for Québec provincial organisations (Laberge & Laberge, 2001), thus for athletes. Additionally, sport seems to have been used by the province of Québec as a way to distinguish

itself from the other Canadian provinces. The success of Québec in winter sports at the Olympics is tremendous, and getting to know more about what leads to such success is left to be discovered. Finally, the use of media data (i.e., newspaper articles) in the quest of finding what impacts Olympic athletes has to my knowledge never been accomplished. Thus, the completion of the current study proved that media data are of great usefulness for attaining such an objective and would benefit from being used by other researchers.

### **Research Questions**

The study that I conducted explored what specific factors impacted consistently successful elite athletes from Québec in their Olympic Games journey(s). This was done by selecting elite Québec athletes who had achieved consistent success on the international scene by winning at least one Olympic medal as well as one medal in their respective World Championships. As it was not possible to study these athletes directly, media data (i.e., newspaper articles) was gathered about these athletes in relation to their specific performances across their Olympic Games journey(s). The larger goal of this study was to identify what characteristics affected the athletes, the impacts that the identified factors had on those Québec athletes and determine how they could be utilized to enhance performance. The following research questions were of interest: 1) What are the characteristics impacting the performances of four highly successful Québec Olympic medalists moving into, during, and out of the Olympic Games and how do they influence the athletes' performances? 2) How can these characteristics be used to help improve the athletes' performances?

### **CHAPTER THREE: Methodology**

In this third chapter are presented the context setting, the media outlet, followed by a self-situating section (i.e., reflexivity). Then are presented information about the selected athletes, the data collection process, the analysis that was used (i.e., inductive thematic analysis), and a section related to how authenticity was ensured within this project.

#### **Context Setting**

The purpose of this section is to explain the context in which the study is grounded. The Canadian sport environment and Québec's sport culture will be detailed to enhance the understanding of the sport context in which the selected athletes evolved in within Canada and especially in Québec.

**Canadian sport environment.** When Canadian athletes reach the national team, they have to adapt to a new structure that is built around the quadrennial Olympic cycle (Schinke et al., 2015). The funding they have access to is dictated by the program "Own the Podium". Launched in 2005, Own the Podium is a not-for-profit organization that has for goal to help obtain more Olympic and Paralympic medals for Canada (Own the Podium, 2017). This program is mainly funded by the Government of Canada and is also supported by the Canadian Olympic Committee, the Canadian Olympic Foundation, and the Canadian Paralympic Committee (Own the Podium, 2017). Own the Podium's mandate is to provide technical support to national sport organizations and suggest funding recommendations towards Olympic medalist hopeful athletes (Own the Podium, 2017).

**Quebec sport culture.** Sport has been shown to be an extremely powerful political force in shaping our societies and cultural identities (Roper, 2016). The culture behind elite athletes has been identified as varying across cultures (Stambulova & Ryba, 2013). Québec culture, as

part of the general North American culture, is an individualistic one where strong competition between athletes from the same environment may be frequent. Athletes are comfortable sharing that they want to be the best and win their event(s) at the expense of the other athletes (and teammates, for individual sports). It has been historically highlighted that language issues were frequent between Québec and Canadian sport federations where there was an obvious lack of services offered in French to francophone athletes, coaches, administrators and officials (Laberge & Laberge, 2001). In 2001, 68% of the Québec sport federations mentioned they have had issues related to the lack of use of French by the Canadian federation they were affiliated to. The unavailability of francophone services could have actually hurt the career of athletes and coaches (Laberge & Laberge, 2001).

The “Institut National du Sport du Québec” (INS Québec; Québec National Institute of Sport) is a non-profit private organization created in 1997 which goal is to provide Québec elite athletes and coaches support and services (e.g., nutrition, physical preparation, mental preparation) comparable to world class practices, leading to excellence (see INS Québec, 2017). The support provided by this organization targets both athletes and coaches. The Québec sport culture is rooted in the desire to achieve worldwide success by having accessible international caliber training facilities, having international level scientific-based and services, following ethical and fair principles, and to innovate (see INS Québec, 2017). As INS Québec hosts eight resident sports in its facilities at the Olympic park in Montréal, these sports represent great opportunities for Québec athletes to practice their sport without having to relocate to another province. These sports are: fencing, gymnastic, judo, synchronized swimming, swimming, speed skating (short track), diving, and water polo.

On the other hand, athletes from Québec are treated with national pride, like as a way to distinguish this province from the other Canadian provinces. Québec invests colossal amounts of money in its sport system to support athletes and offer international level sport facilities. Québec athletes found some great legacies in certain summer sports such as diving, synchronized swimming, and wrestling but seems to specially excel in winter sports. As a result, over the 25 medals won at the Sochi 2014 Olympics, 11 of them were obtain by athletes from Québec or for which Québec athletes have contributed (e.g., hockey), which represents 44% of the total of medal won by Canada.

### **Media Outlets**

In the present study, media data was grounded in post-positivism because it allowed a valuable way to access to athletes' stories and words to glean understanding of their performances as they stated these in a public forum (i.e., news media). As the media can be viewed as a cultural site – from constructionist or post-positivist perspectives (McGannon & McMahon, 2016) – studying the media's focus on four prominent elite athletes to answer the research questions of interest allowed for a window into athlete's experiences and cultural impacts influencing the athletes' performances. Because journalists have met the athletes during the different stages (meta-transitions) that are of interest in the current study, media data grounded in post-positivism thus represent an opportunity to access the athletes' words and experiences. To be clear, solely the athletes' words and accounts were of interest in the present study by linking these to sport psychology concepts (e.g., mental skills, transitions), rather than the media interpretation of what was said. The purpose of the study was to explore the athletes' journey(s) to the Olympics, rather than the journalists' perceptions of the athletes' journey(s) to



the Games or to explore the media representations as a cultural window into broader socio-cultural narrative or discursive understandings (McGannon & McMahon, 2016).

### **Situating Myself**

Athletes are influenced by their culture, but practitioners and researchers are also shaped by their culture (Stambulova, Jonhson, & Stambulov, 2009). Reflective practice in applied sport psychology settings was described as an approach that “focuses on practitioner self-awareness of limitations, self-interests, frustrations, and prejudices in the consultation process” (Schinke, McGannon, Parham, & Lane, 2012b, p. 35). Reflective practices in applied sport psychology have been shown to contribute to resolving power issues by developing ethical and knowledgeable practitioners who can contribute to augment athletes’ well-being (Schinke et al., 2012b). Reflective practice focusses on the recognition from practitioners of limitations, personal interests, frustrations, bias, and preconceived ideas. The same can be applied to research where reflective practices can enhance the quality of one’s study. In that sense, reflective research is executed when the researcher challenges, assess, and is critical about his or her own behaviours within the developed study (Schinke et al., 2012b). Reflective research provides a better understanding of one’s self, diminishing potential impacts of one’s own limitations and preconceived ideas.

During one of my graduate classes, I got to follow an arts-based procedure (see Blodgett et al. (2017) for an example of a study using the same arts-based method) where the purpose was to help me identify how my self could impact my research. Looking back at the mandala I drew in that one class, I was able to reflect on how the different parts of who I am could influence my research. One of my preconceived ideas was in relation to the role of family in life. Family is very important for me and communicating and exchanging with those people around me is

crucial in my life. When questioning my choices, my actions, or myself, I go back to my direct family (i.e., parents, sisters, partner) to discuss and get insights about what to do or how to (re)act. The close relationship I have with my family could have influenced my empathy for the social aspect found within the athletes' experience and the importance of social support. Additionally, my self-interest for sports did play a certain role in my research. I played badminton competitively during high school and cégep (pre-university academic institution in Québec) and was a varsity runner at Laurentian University. My background in individual sports made me choose this orientation for the current project because I believed that my experience could have been useful in understanding the athletes' experiences. Sports are still an integral part of my life as they are a source of inner peace, confidence, and amusement. My background and interest in individual sports already tinted my research as I chose to exclusively focus on individual sport athletes. I felt that my passion for sport allowed me to have a stronger connection and ties to my research project as I knew what it was like to be dedicated to training hard and sacrificing personal time for athletic purposes. However, because I have never fully pursued an athletic career at an elite level, it was hard for me to have an idea of the commitment and stress that such a career could represent. Thus, I believe that my excitement for sport permitted me to better my research, but it at the same time left open the exploration of the unique experiences of this higher level of performance. Similarly, being a university student which came with having a limited income helped me understand financial struggles elite amateur athlete might have faced on a regular basis. I think that my socioeconomic status played in my favor in helping me understand financial struggles and stress amateur athletes could have gone through, consistently living with a tight budget and having to reflect on any potential expenses. Finally, the last part of myself that could have impacted my research was related to my knowledge and

experiences as a francophone and Québec citizen. Being from Québec and having a similar culture and language as the athletes represented a trump for understanding the athletes' expression and terms used in the media interviews. Moving to Ontario to study and being immersed in a mainly English environment permitted me to understand what athletes part of a national team could go through when the spoken language was not their native one during training and competitions. I believe it served me to better understand the expressions and profound meanings of statements found in the data, by referencing to my own past experiences.

### **Participants**

A total of four Québec Olympians (two males and two females) from individual sports were studied to answer the research questions. The selected athletes were: Marianne St-Gelais, Justine Dufour-Lapointe, Charles Hamelin, and Mikaël Kingsbury. These athletes are all from the province of Québec, targeting a specific subculture (Québec's culture in Canada) and enhancing potential similarities and coherence between them. The individual sport criterion was used to permit better comparison between the factors impacting athletes. The specific chosen athletes have been selected for their consistency in staying among the best of their sport, defined as having one at least Olympic medal plus one World Championships medal. All of them however over qualify, having achieved noteworthy accomplishments justifying their inclusion in this project. The selected athletes are all recent Olympic medalists and were still active winter Olympians that have medaled in the last winter Olympic Games in Sochi 2014, while two of them have also medaled in previous Olympic Games (i.e., Torino 2006, Vancouver 2010). Winter sports athletes were selected because Canada, and particularly Québec, have been quite successful in Winter Olympics. Indeed, sending 222 athletes including 45 Québec athletes to the Sochi Olympics, Canada won a total of 25 medals (see Canadian Olympic Committee, 2018),

where Québec athletes contributed to 11 medals (44%), which placed the country in the top of the medal ranking per country. Canada also ranked among the best countries at the Vancouver 2010 and Torino 2006 Olympics, placing first and fifth respectively. In Vancouver, Québec athletes contributed to winning 11 medals representing 42.3% of the total number of medals. On the opposite, Canada finished 20<sup>th</sup> at Rio 2016 Olympics (53 Québec athletes over 314 Canadian athletes) and 27<sup>th</sup> at London 2012 Olympics (59 Québec athletes over 279 Canadian athletes), where Québec athletes have contributed to six (27,3%) and five (27.8%) medals respectively. Finally, the athletes selected for the current project have also been chosen because they were all still active in their sport up to the PyeongChang Olympics (which were not included in this study) and were part of the Québec culture and sport system during their sport career. The following section presents the selected athletes and their achievements.

**The athletes.** Marianne St-Gelais is a short track speed skater who won two silver medals (500-metre and 3000-metre relay) at her first Olympics in Vancouver 2010. She also medaled in Sochi 2014, reaching the second place at the 3000-metre relay event. St-Gelais also had remarkable performances at the 2016 World Championships where she won gold at the 1500-metre, silver at both the 500-metre and 3000-metre relay and finished second in the overall classification. Year 2017 was as noteworthy. St-Gelais again finished second in the overall classification of the World Championships, and won silver in the 500-metre, 1000-metre, and 1500-metre. Additionally, St-Gelais finished first in World Cup season ranking in the 500-metre. St-Gelais' exceptional achievements reveal why she was selected for the study.

Justine Dufour-Lapointe is a freestyle (i.e., moguls) skier who won the gold medal at her first Olympics in Sochi 2014, along with her sisters Chloe who finished with the silver medal, and Maxime who also participated in Sochi's Games. Justine also won bronze at her first World

Championships in 2013, reproducing her result in 2017, and reached the highest step of the podium in the same event in 2015. Additionally, Dufour-Lapointe finished second in the overall World Cup moguls event for five consecutive seasons (i.e., from 2011-2012 to 2015-2016). Her results on the international scene makes her one of the greatest athletes from the province of Québec, which is why she was chosen for the current study.

Charles Hamelin is a short track speed skater who won multiple Olympic medals. He first obtained silver at the 5000-metre relay at his first Olympics in Torino 2006. Then, at the 2010 Vancouver Olympics, Hamelin won two gold medals, in the 500-metre and 5000-metre relay. Even more impressive was that these two medals were won within a 30-minute span, with the second podium shared with among others his brother François. Hamelin showed once more proof of consistency in his performances after obtaining the gold medal in the 1500-metre event of the 2014 Sochi Games. Hamelin also obtained for the first time the title of World Champion of the overall ranking of the 2018 World Championships where he won the gold medal in both the 1500-metre and 1000-metre.

Finally, Mikaël Kingsbury obtained the silver medal in moguls skiing at the 2014 Sochi Games, alongside his now retired teammate and two times Olympic champion Alexandre Bilodeau. Since 2011, Kingsbury reached the podium of all of the major competitions including at the International Ski Federation World Championships (FIS World Championships). His domination is seen in his incredible achievements in almost all competitions he entered, including on the World Cup circuit where he won seven straight Crystal Globes, from the 2011-2012 season up to the 2017-18 season, attributed to the overall World Cup champion every season. Additionally, Kingsbury medaled at all of his participations to the FIS World Championships, winning bronze in moguls and silver in dual moguls (not an Olympic discipline)

in 2011, gold in moguls and silver in dual moguls in 2013, silver in moguls in 2015, bronze in moguls and gold in dual moguls in 2017, and silver in both moguls and dual moguls in 2018. Kingsbury also holds the record for the most World Cup victories (i.e., 47) and for the most consecutive World Cup wins (i.e., 13). Kingsbury's domination makes him one of if not the best athlete ever in mogul skiing which is why he was included in the study.

The included athletes participated in different events at different Olympic Games. For example, St-Gelais qualified only for the 500 m and the 3000 m relay at the Vancouver Olympics while she qualified for four events at Sochi's Olympics. The table 1 provides details about all the events in which the included athletes took part of at the different Olympics.

Table 1

*List of events that the selected athletes have participated in at different Olympics*

Athletes	Events per athlete per Olympic Games		
	Torino 2006	Vancouver 2010	Sochi 2014
Charles Hamelin	1500 m and 5000 m relay	All four distances <sup>a</sup>	All four distances <sup>a</sup>
Marianne St-Gelais	x	500 m and 3000 m relay	All four distances <sup>a</sup>
Justine Dufour-Lapointe	x	x	Single mogul skiing
Mikaël Kingsbury	x	x	Single mogul skiing

*Note.* <sup>a</sup>All four distances for short track speed skating are 500 m, 1000 m 1500 m and relay (i.e., 5000 m for men and 3000 m for women)

To better understand the different accomplishments of the selected athletes, there is a need to briefly overview the competition process of both sports (i.e., short track speed skating and mogul skiing) at the Olympics. There are four events at the Olympics in short track speed skating. They are the 500-metre, 1000-metre, 1500-metre, and relay (i.e., 3000-metre for women and 5000-metre for men). The first two athletes of each round go the next one for the 500-metre and 1000-metre, while it is the first three for the 1500-metre. Once in final, the first three to

complete the course without penalties win medals. Athletes' position on the start line depends of their time on the previous round. The faster athletes were, the closest to the inside line they will be positioned. Skaters have to follow precise rules for passing which will not be described here. Because of the close interactions between the skaters, falls and penalties are frequent.

In mogul skiing at the Olympics, there is only the traditional mogul event (no dual mogul like at the World Championships). In the mogul event, athletes have a first round of qualification with 30 athletes from which the top 10 go straight to *final 1* while the other 20 have another chance with the *qualification 2*. The top 10 of this second round of qualification joins the others in the *final 1*. Then, out of the top 20 in *final 1*, the best 12 athletes go to *final 2*. The six best athletes of *final 2* go to *final 3* (super final) to compete for a medal. Skiers' score is never cumulative which means that at every round they start from zero and all have an equal chance to pass to the next round. Mogul skiing is a judged sport. The three scoring categories are the turns, the air (jumps) and the speed that are worth 60 %, 20 %, and 20 % respectively.

### **Data Collection**

The data for this project were collected from newspapers articles from the province of Québec. Specific newspapers from the areas the athletes were from were included to have access to information that would be shared only in those local environments because of privileged access to the athletes. The newspapers were also selected because they are part of the most popular newspapers in Québec and/or they covered specific parts of the province. The newspapers were : *La Presse*, *Le Devoir*, *L'Écho de Saint-Eustache*, *L'Éveil*, *Le Nouvelliste*, *Le Quotidien*, *Le Soleil*, *La Tribune*, and *La Voix de l'Est*. The selected newspapers were all accessible through the database *Eureka*, which was available to the researcher through his membership at the *Bibliothèque et Archives Nationales du Québec* (BAnQ; Quebec National

Library and Archives) being a Québec resident. The database *Eureka* had archives from all the aforementioned newspapers in downloadable “pdf” format. This database permitted to search through all the selected newspapers at the same time with specific key words. The key words “Jeux Olympique” (Olympic Games) were added with the athletes’ names in the search system to narrow the research about the athletes’ Olympic journey(s). The content of the articles that were considered pertained to athletes from the point of their qualification(s) for the Olympics until two months post-Games, which covered the three aforementioned meta-transitions (i.e., Focused preparation for the Olympic Games, To the Olympic podium, and To the post-Games). The post-Games cut off had been selected because it represented the maximum time that is usually taken to conduct debriefs with athletes after the Olympics (see AASP, 2012; McArdle, Moore, & Lyons, 2004). A selection process then took place where articles related to the athletes in the specific aforementioned meta-transitions containing the athletes’ words were gathered from date of qualification until two months after the Olympics. For example, articles about Charles Hamelin including the words “Jeux Olympiques” in relation to Torino Olympics were included for the dates between November 18 2005 to April 26 2006 inclusively. See table 2 for exact inclusion dates.

Table 2

*Dates of qualification for Olympic Games per athlete and cut-off*

Athletes	Dates of Qualification for Olympic Games		
	Torino 2006	Vancouver 2010	Sochi 2014
Charles Hamelin	November 18 2005	March 07 2009	August 18 2013
Marianne St-Gelais	-	August 18 2009	August 18 2013
Justine Dufour-Lapointe	-	-	March 6 2013
Mikaël Kingsbury	-	-	February 18 2013
Cut off	April 26 2006	April 28 2010	April 23 2014



The total of articles included within the present study is 129 (see table 3). This total was calculated in a way that counted the articles were individually identify to pertain to one athletes and where an article that included the words of two of the included athletes was individually associated to both athletes, thus counting for two in the grand total. This way, fifty-one articles pertained to Hamelin, 30 to St-Gelais, 36 to Kingsbury, and 12 to Dufour-Lapointe. Five articles were related to the 2006 Torino Olympics (Hamelin only), 35 to the 2010 Vancouver Olympics (Hamelin and St-Gelais), and 89 to the 2014 Sochi Olympics (all four athletes). Only five articles pertained to the Torino Olympics because only Hamelin participated in them, and could also be explained because publishing online newspaper articles was not an as common practice as nowadays. On the other hand, all four athletes participated in Sochi Olympics and articles were more frequently published online in 2014 which explains why more articles were related to the Sochi Olympics. Table 3 provides details about how many articles per athletes were used in relation to all the Olympics they took part of.

Table 3

*Number of articles included in the study per athlete and per Olympic Games*

Athletes	Total articles	Olympic Games		
		Torino 2006	Vancouver 2010	Sochi 2014
Charles Hamelin	51	5	17	29
Marianne St-Gelais	30	0	18	12
Justine Dufour-Lapointe	12	0	0	12
Mikaël Kingsbury	36	0	0	36
Total articles	129	5	35	89

## **Thematic Analysis**

Thematic analysis (TA) is used to identify patterns of meaning or themes in qualitative data. This method further permits to describe and interpret the essence and significance of the identified patterns. There are two possible pathways, one that is tied to a realist ontological framework, and the other one, not anchored in a specific ontology can be used within a variety of ontological and epistemological stances (Braun, Clarke, & Weate, 2016).

TA was used to explore the ideas and implications that support what was explicitly and implicitly shared. This was done by evaluating what Québec athletes shared about the various factors influencing their Olympic journey(s). The current study is grounded in a realist ontological framework and post-positivist epistemology. Used within a realist approach, thematic analysis permits to “theorize motivations, experience, and meaning in a straightforward way, because a simple, largely unidirectional relationship is assumed between meaning and experience and language (language reflects and enables us to articulate meaning and experience)” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 85). For the purpose of the project, inductive thematic analysis was used as a way to highlight uniqueness about the athletes’ Olympic experiences. Different codes and leveled themes were created from the data (i.e., bottom-up approach; Braun & Clarke, 2012) rather than trying to fit the data in pre-existing categories.

Braun et al. (2016) presented TA as being very efficient with textual data such as pre-existing data (e.g., newspapers) as it was used in this study. As analysis is an active process, the analytic process is fluid, where for example it is possible to go back to previous steps if needed (Braun et al., 2016). The six steps presented by Braun et al. (2016) were followed to properly execute the analysis. The familiarization with the data (i.e., newspaper articles) was the first necessary step. This deep immersion was executed by reading multiple times the newspaper

articles from all the athletes while making notes about what grabbed the researcher's attention. At the same time, a reflective journal was kept to help the researcher in the development of the different codes and leveled themes in the following steps. The researcher read the data and the research questions to get a sense of ideas and concepts that could be identify. Initial notes were taken along this first phase helping in analytically examine the newspaper articles. The notes that were taken mainly referred to the orientation questions suggested by Braun et al. (2016) such as: "What implications might this account have?" (p. 196). An example of a note is: "Enhancement of confidence because of accomplishing rarely done achievement". The second phase related to coding, which helped generating meanings of the data. Codes are key words or sentences that label elements that appear important. While reading once more the newspaper articles, codes were attributed to data that stood out explicitly or implicitly to the researcher. Systematic and rigorous codes were created, building a solid structure for the next phase, the theme development. An example of code in relation to the previous example of a note is the following: "Enhancement of confidence after great performances". The third phase that Braun et al. (2016) have grouped with phase four and five because of their connections was about identifying themes. Codes reflecting similar ideas were grouped to form themes or patterns, from which important information was expressed. Thus, after coding all the data, the researcher reviewed the codes and decided what was the best way to group and present what was relevant to the study to best answering the research questions. An example of a theme is the following: "Gaining confidence from achievements". The fourth phase, reviewing themes, necessitated to make sure that the themes fitted with the codes that had been identified and that there was no misinterpretation coming from poor coding. The researcher then made sure that the themes were coherent with the research question. For example, the theme about gaining confidence from

achievements was situated in relation to the three meta-transitions to see where it accurately fitted. The alignment of the themes and subthemes was compared between and within layered themes to guarantee the establishment of unique and individual cases. Creating clear definitions of each theme was also used to help clarify the individual meanings of the themes. The fifth phase was the process of naming themes that captured the real meaning of the themes, their nature. An example of this step is the theme *Building self-confidence during races and competitions* which highlights how the athletes' confidence was developed during their preparation for the Olympic Games (during the first meta-transition). The final and sixth phase, writing up, required to edit and consolidate the writing that had already been done throughout the other phases, as it is expected in TA that the research will not wait until the end to start writing but integrated this part within the five previous ones. Specific and meaningful extracts were selected and added to support the identified themes. At the end of the final step, a report was produced presenting the whole analysis process.

### **Authenticity**

The current project is situated within a realist ontology and post-positivist epistemology. The authenticity of the project was ensured by following Braun and Clarke's (2006) 15-point checklist to conduct a suitable thematic analysis. The first criterion relates to the transcription process which was not necessary in the current study as the data was newspapers articles. The criteria two to six refer to the coding process. The second criterion asks that each data item be given equal attention. This was assured by coding all the data without leaving anything behind. The third criterion explains how themes have to come from a thorough and inclusive coding process rather than from just a few examples. This step was accomplished by creating a worksheet with all the codes and grouping the ones pertaining to similar aspect of Olympic

performances. For example, all the codes relating to self-confidence were grouped and then divided according to different subthemes in relation to the three meta-transitions. The fourth criterion mentions the need to have collated all important extract together. This criterion was respected by gathering all the extracts under the potential themes that had been created so the ones that exemplified the themes the best could eventually be presented in the final report. Braun and Clarke's (2006) fifth criterion relates to comparing the themes to each other and to the data set. This was executed by making sure the data collected under each theme represented the focus of the theme. The data that did not represent the themes well were moved or deleted. The sixth criterion, similar to the the fifth one, refers to the internal coherence, consistency, and distinctiveness of each theme. All the data under each theme were read to evaluate the coherence and consistency of the themes, and when the themes seemed too similar, they were either changed to capture more single ideas, or merged, which necessitated the refinement of certain themes. The criteria seven to 10 pertain to the analysis. The criterion seven asks for an actual analysis of the data rather than simply being paraphrased or described. This was respected by engaging in a constant questioning about what the data meant beyond what was said. The thesis supervisor also offered further questioning and insights in relation to this criterion, which helped executing a deeper and more interpretive analysis. The eighth criterion is about making sure that the analysis matches the data. This was done by obtaining an additional opinion from the thesis supervisor about the analytic claims in relation to the data. The goal was to be as analytical and interpretive as possible while respecting what was actually said by the athletes. The ninth criterion is about telling a convincing and well organized story. This was achieved by interpreting the data which permitted to think one step further than what was said by the athletes and where a solid template was built to create a coherent and fluent story. Respecting the tenth

criterion necessitated a balanced presentation of extracts and interpretation throughout the results. A ratio of around 60% of interpretation narrative and 40% of extract was overall respected, which represents a great balance. The eleventh criterion relates to taking sufficient time for all phases of the analysis. Indeed, even though some phases took longer (e.g., phases of creating and refining the themes), no phase of the analysis was rushed and the needed time to complete each of them was taken. Braun and Clarke's (2006) twelfth criterion refers to the explanation of the assumptions and approaches to the thematic analysis. The ontology and epistemology of the project were presented at the beginning of the current section in order to fulfil this criterion. The thirteenth criterion is about doing what one claims to actually be doing. The methods used in the present study are therefore coherent with the analysis. Fourteenth, respecting this criterion included making sure that the concepts and language were consistent with the epistemological position of the analysis, where the post-positivism framed approach dictated how the study was presented. Finally, the active position of the researcher was acknowledged throughout the study when it was mentioned that codes and themes were created rather than having had emerged, which relates to Braun and Clarke's (2006) fifteenth criterion. The aforementioned list of criteria assured the authenticity of the project and that the thematic analysis was of great quality.

## CHAPTER FOUR: Results

The results are presented within the three meta-transitions (i.e., Focused preparation for the Olympics: Developing skills and feelings of being at your top, To the Olympic podium: Managing the magnitude of the Games, To the post-Games: Reintegrating into the society) earlier described. These three meta-transitions represent the three multilayered themes. Indeed, the factors influencing the chosen Québec athletes' performances within each of these meta-transitions are explained in the results as well as the ways those athletes dealt with the specific factors. Within the first meta-transition (i.e., Focused preparation for the Olympics: Developing skills and feelings of being at your top), two themes were identified: *Building self-confidence through races and competitions* and *Establishing best practices*. Five themes were created in the second meta-transition (i.e., To the Olympic podium: Managing the magnitude of the Games): *Having clear goals for the Olympics*, *Facing and managing the distractions of the Games*, *Building self-confidence through races at the Olympics*, *Having and following performance and motivations plans and strategies*, and *Managing the immediate results at the Games*. Finally, the two themes identified in the third meta-transition (i.e., To the post-Games: Reintegrating into the society) are *Fulfilling immediate demands after the Games* and *Reflecting on one's performances at the Olympics while turning the focus on the rest of the season*. The subthemes are described within each theme. All the in text quotations are originally provided in French and then translated verbatim into English beneath each one separated by a slash (/).

### **Focused preparation for the Olympics: Developing skills and feelings of being at your top**

The first meta-transition refers to preparing for the biggest sport event of the world (i.e., Olympic Games). Two themes are a part of this meta-transition, which are 1) Building self-confidence during races and competitions and 2) Establishing best practices.

**Building self-confidence during races and competitions.** This theme is comprised of data relating to the development of self-confidence during the preparation to the Olympics. The theme includes three subthemes: 1) Enhancement/development of self-confidence with victories, come-backs, and accomplishments, 2) Positive relationships with the coach(es) throughout the season reduces worries, and 3) Early Olympic selection/qualification reduces stress and enhances confidence.

***Enhancement/development of self-confidence with victories, come-backs, and accomplishments.*** The included athletes mentioned quite often feeling more confident due to being in control of their performances and achieving their goals (e.g., podium) throughout the Olympic season. Learning one's own potential by achieving something new was also mentioned as enhancing confidence. Kingsbury mentioned how learning more about himself and his skills helped him for the Olympic Games. After having heard his teammate and fierce opponent Alexandre Bilodeau's high score during the 2013 World Championships, Kingsbury still produced a solid performance and won the competition. This success brought him the confidence of being able to excel when it counted. After the competition, Kingsbury shared: "Le message que je retiens, c'est que je suis capable de performer lors des événements qui sont importants, alors ça regarde très bien pour les Jeux olympiques. C'est vraiment en tant que champion du monde que je voulais arriver à Sochi" (Carignan, 2013, p. 48). / "The message I retain, it's that I can perform [well] during important events, so it's looking great for the Olympics. It's really as the World Champion that I wanted to arrive to Sochi". This victory contributed to Kingsbury's confidence and conviction that he was able to perform at his best when it counted the most. This confidence could then be used during the Olympics to reduce the stress.



Another source of confidence came from the ability to adapt to the changing climatic environment for skiers. For example, in February 2013, Mikaël Kingsbury competed in the Olympic preparation World Cup event in Sochi, which he won. He then commented: “On a vraiment eu droit à tout aujourd'hui, avec le froid, le vent, puis la pluie... La neige était très molle, comme de la sloche. Je n'ai toutefois raté aucune descente de toute la journée et j'étais très confiant à la fin” (Marois, 2013a, p. S7). / “We really got everything today, with the cold, wind, then the rain... The snow was very soft, like slush. I however didn't miss any of my runs all day and I was very confident at the end”. Kingsbury's ability to overcome all the weather changes while still not doing any error brought him a boost of confidence, as he explicitly mentioned. Overcoming the elements and performing at his best made him feel in control of his body with the ability to adjust to anything.

Maintaining confidence throughout the Olympic season is crucial, as shared by Charles Hamelin. He further emphasised the positive effect of winning medals on the World Cup circuit during the Olympic season, helping him to maintain high level performances from competitions to competitions. Leading on the overall ranking of the World Cup with six medals including three gold at the end of October 2013, Hamelin expressed how these previous results made him confident in his abilities and readiness for the following competitions: “Mes résultats en Asie m'ont mis en confiance et je veux continuer dans le même sens lors des deux prochaines compétitions en Europe” (La Presse Canadienne, 2013c, p. 51). / “My results in Asia brought me confidence and I want to continue the same way for the next two competitions in Europe”. Hamelin's words also referred to the use of a momentum going to the next competitions, eventually leading to the 2014 Olympics. Again, feeling in control and able to perform well

under any circumstances made Hamelin confident in his capacity to winning and belonging to the category of the best athletes.

The preparation phase for the Olympics therefore seemed a crucial moment in refining athletes' confidence. Reaching the podium in multiple events and doing so after low performances at the beginning of a competition helped boost athletes' confidence and to perform better. Winning competitions and enhancing their confidence created a cycle of success where success brought more confidence and more success. Maintaining this cycle of success up to the Olympic Games appeared to be beneficial for the Olympic performances.

***Positive relationships with the coach(es) throughout the season reduces worries.*** The high quality relationship between the coach and the athlete seemed to have been an important factor that helped the athletes reduce potential worries and focus on what counted. Fully trusting the coach and following their advices was shared by multiple athletes as fostering great performance outcomes. Hamelin provided the most explicit example of trust towards his coach. In October 2013, discussing about the reasons behind his success, Hamelin spoke about his great relationship with his coach as being one the sources of his success: “Notre relation est bonne et avoir confiance en son entraîneur, ça aide beaucoup. Je fais tout ce qu'il nous donne de A à Z, pas plus, pas moins, et je sais que ça va fonctionner” (Drouin, 2013b, p. LA PRESSE AFFAIRES10). / “Our relationship is great and trusting one's coach, it helps a lot. I do everything he gives us from A to Z, no more, no less, and I know it's going to work”. Hamelin's trust towards his coach knowing that the exact work given by the latter was the most optimal training possible definitely reduced fears of not doing enough or doing too much. Their 7-year relationship (at the time on the interview) probably allowed for such closeness and trust. The

optimal preparation he felt he was accomplishing must have given him the confidence and belief of becoming as physically sharp as he possibly could.

As a rookie on the team in 2009, St-Gelais mentioned how lucky she and all her team were to work with their coach who permitted everyone to achieve success. St-Gelais declared:

Je viens de connaître une très bonne saison, a reconnu Marianne St-Gelais. Elle a débuté avec la Coupe du monde en octobre 2008. Il y a ensuite eu le Championnat mondial junior, à Sherbrooke, et les essais pour les Jeux olympiques. Toute notre équipe a connu une belle année. Nous avons la chance de travailler avec un entraîneur extraordinaire (Sébastien Cros). Il arrive à nous faire faire des miracles. (Émond, 2009, p. 29) /

I have had a very good season. It started with the World Cup in October 2008. There has been the Junior World Championship, in Sherbrooke, and the trials for the Olympic Games. All of our team have had a good year. We have the chance to work with an extraordinary coach (Sébastien Cros). He is able to make us do miracles.

St-Gelais not only gave tremendous credit to her coach for her and her team's successes, but added that their coach helped them achieve miracles, thus accomplishments that athletes would only have dreamt of but had then achieved. In her case, this referred to qualifying for the 2010 Olympics while her goal was supposed to be the Sochi 2014 Olympics. The way St-Gelais described her relationship with her coach displayed her trust and engagement towards him, revealing a high level of closeness and cohesion. Believing in her coach's abilities to guide her in achieving her goals must have built up her confidence in feeling she was doing the right preparation for the Olympics, which in this case led to winning two silver Olympic medals at the 2010 Games.

The establishment of a game plan was also crucial to athletes which plan was provided by coaches' to ease athletes' tasks. In a World Cup event of December 2013, Dufour-Lapointe mentioned following the game plan created by her coaches leading to a successful performance:

La première Coupe du monde de l'année est toujours plus stressante que les autres. Je suis restée très prudente à ma première qualification... j'ai suivi le plan de match des entraîneurs puis en finale, je me sentais vraiment en contrôle. J'ai pu pousser la machine et tout donner, et je crois que c'est ça qui m'a permis d'atteindre le podium. (La Presse Canadienne, 2013a, p. 29)

The first World Cup of the year is always more stressful than the others. I stayed very careful at my first qualification...I followed the coaches' game plan and in the final, I really felt in control. I was able to push my body and give my all, and I think that's what permitted me to reach the podium.

In a stressful situation, Dufour-Lapointe chose to follow her coaches' game plan which encouraged her to develop her confidence, giving her the tools to execute better performances in the final rounds of competition. She did not have to worry about choosing an approach to her competition, as her coaches provided useful assistance and adapted a strategy for her to augment her chance of finishing on the podium. This implies that she had a great coach-athlete relationships and that her coaches knew her well enough so they could create the best personalized plan for her. This support from her coaches helped her perform at her best and feel in control, leading to a podium in that specific World Cup event.

The coach-athlete relationship seemed to have had a considerable impact on athletes' performances during the preparation to the Olympics phase. The positive and trusting relationship led to reduced worries and higher level of performances. This permitted the athletes

to reduce and avoid sources of distraction they could have faced (e.g., having to choose a strategy, having stressful relationship with coach) and helped them focus on their performance tasks. The coach's support permitted the athletes to just be athletes and focus on what mattered, their performance.

***Early Olympic selection/qualification reduces stress and enhances confidence.*** There are quotas for the number of athletes in the different disciplines for each sport which limits athletes' chances to obtain a place to compete at the Olympics. The selection process differs between sports. Without going too much in depth in those processes, Canadian short track speed skaters can qualify different ways such as by achieving a certain number of podiums during targeted competitions in the Olympic season (prequalification) or by qualifying during the actual Olympic trials (i.e., competing against their Canadian teammates) usually held in August of the Olympic season. In moguls skiing, athletes have to qualify by reaching multiple podiums in specific IFS World Cup events or ISF World Championships (see Freestyle Canada, 2016). This can be done more than a year before the Olympics such as it was the case for Dufour-Lapointe for the Sochi Olympics. She qualified early March 2013 for the Sochi 2014 Olympics because of her first place in the 2014 World Championships. She then discussed the ambiance within the Canadian Freestyle Ski Team in relation to the remaining spots on the Olympic team:

C'est sûr que tout le monde y pense, explique-t-elle. Plusieurs ont le potentiel pour aller aux Jeux, mais il n'y aura de la place que pour quelques-uns. [...] Chez les gars, Mik [Kingsbury] et Alex [Bilodeau] sont aussi déjà qualifiés pour les Jeux et ça va les aider à rester détendus. Après tout, c'est la dernière course de la saison et on peut s'amuser.

(Marois, 2013b, p. S5) /

People start to think about it [Olympic selection] for sure. Many have the potential to go to the Games, but there will be room for only some of them. [...] For the guys, Mik [Kingsbury] et Alex [Bilodeau] are also already qualified for the Games and it will help them stay relaxed. After all, it's the last race of the season and we can have fun.

Dufour-Lapointe's words implied that there was tension growing up within the team to obtain their spot on the Olympic team as the Games approached. By already having a secured place on the Olympic team, she had the privilege of not going through these feelings of tension, being able to perform with less stress and anxiety about the outcome, which was shown when she described her male teammates being able to stay relaxed during the competition because they had already qualified for the Olympics. She was able to "have fun" because the outcome did not matter as much for her because of her early qualification.

Hamelin echoed Dufour-Lapointe's saying about the relieve of an early qualification. Once qualified for the 2010 Olympics (i.e., March 9<sup>th</sup> 2009), Hamelin shared how qualifying early and not having to go through the Olympic trials was taking lots of pressure off of his shoulders: "Je suis vraiment, vraiment soulagé d'avoir une grosse compétition de moins à me mettre sur les épaules. Ça me donnera un bon moment pour bien me préparer pour les Jeux olympiques et d'arriver au meilleur de ma forme" (Drouin, 2009, p. S4). / "I am really, really relieved to have one less big competition on my shoulders. It will give me a good moment to have a good preparation for the Olympic Games and to arrive at my best". Hamelin's words emphasizing "really, really relieved" tells how much stressful the Olympic trials can be and being able to avoid going through this process seemed to be of much soothing. Additionally, this quote by Hamelin suggests that as soon as one is selected for the Olympics, the focus is now

turned towards preparing for this event. Having more time to prepare must allow for more time to develop their skills and to peak for the big moment (i.e., Olympic performance).

Kingsbury also seemed to react the same way after being qualified early for the Games, feeling pressure fading away. However, maybe because of how early he qualified for the 2014 Sochi Games (i.e., February 16<sup>th</sup> 2013) and the important upcoming competition (World Championships), his focus stayed on the end of the season with the last competition being World Championship, in March 2014. Kingsbury indicated: “Être déjà certain de ma place aux Jeux va m'aider à être encore plus détendu, a estimé Mikaël, déjà vainqueur de 15 épreuves en Coupe du monde. Cela va me permettre de bien préparer la suite de la saison, les Championnats du monde en particulier” (Marois, 2013a, p. S7). / “Being certain of my place at the Games will help me be even more relaxed. This will allow me to have a good preparation of the continuation of the season, the World Championships in particular”. As he mentioned, Kingsbury’s very early qualification allowed him to stay even more relaxed and in control, helping him to focus on the important competitions that were approaching. This quote further emphasizes the beneficial impact of an early qualification, helping to reduce the stress and anxiety for the following competitions.

Later in the summer, Kingsbury shared his thoughts about his first summer training for the Olympics. Already knowing that he was going to be on the Olympic team, Kingsbury was able to focus on a specific preparation for the Games: “C'est le premier été où je m'entraîne officiellement pour les Jeux olympiques, a rappelé Kingsbury, visiblement gonflé à bloc. Je vais tout faire pour arriver en haut de la piste, prêt à 100%. Et que tout ait l'air facile!” (Drouin, 2013a, p. S5). / “It’s the first summer that I officially train for the Olympic Games. I will do all I can to arrive at the top of the slope, ready at 100%. And for everything to look easy!”

Kingsbury's commitment towards his preparation appeared to be high knowing that he was training for the Olympics. Because of his early selection, he shared wanting to do everything in his power to be at his best for the Games. Such a determination and focus towards the Olympics was possible because he was already qualified and might not have happened if he was still fighting for a spot on the Olympic team.

Thus, the early qualification seemed to have played an important part in the preparation for the Olympics. The early qualification reduced athletes' stress level for the following competitions and permitted a deeper focus on the Olympic preparation. This lower pressure could have permitted the athletes to rely on intrinsic motivation to compete and win (e.g., pleasure and enjoyment of practicing their sport) rather than the extrinsic motivation of qualifying for the Olympics which could be associated with more stress.

**Establishing best practices.** The Olympic year was a period where athletes could learn from what has worked the best for them. The three subthemes identified within this theme are 1) Reconsidering/creating patterns of success, 2) Developing resiliency and learning from previous mistakes, and 3) Having goals for the season.

***Reconsidering/creating patterns of success.*** During the meta-transition *Focused preparation for the Olympics: Developing skills and feelings of being at your top*, all of the athletes' experiences could have served as learning tools to improve their skills for the Games. They tried to learn from what worked for them and they recognized those patterns and strategies so they could use them during the crucial performances of the Olympics.

The best examples of the recognition of successes come from Hamelin, Kingsbury, and Dufour-Lapointe. First, Hamelin shared how his strategy of domination by leading the race from start to finish worked well for him in the World Championships: "J'aime beaucoup faire ça,



surtout au 500 m. Je sais que je suis capable, que j'ai la forme pour le faire. Ça ajoute un peu de velours. Je ne pense pas que ça s'est vu souvent (aux Mondiaux)” (La Presse, 2009, p. 52). / I really like doing that, especially at the 500 m. I know I can do it, that I have the physical capacities to do it. It’s a little flattering. I don’t think it’s been seen often (in World Championships)”. Hamelin’s victory in the 500-metre race in the 2009 World Championships confirmed him that his strategy of leading the whole race worked for that event. The confidence gained through this experience also helped him justify the use of this strategy in other competitions such as the Olympics.

For Kingsbury, establishing the best practice was also about using strategies that worked in the past that he knew could lead to a positive outcome. Indeed, why would an athlete change what works? Answering whether after becoming the most dominant skier for Sochi, after winning the World Championships in March 2009, he would change the way he interprets events and thus change his approach to competitions, Kingsbury responded firmly that his way of doing was helping him achieving success so he would stick with it:

Non, l'an dernier j'ai remporté la Coupe du monde. Cette année, dans mes courses, ça va bien comme ça depuis le début. Alors, je garde la même recette. Je m'améliore toujours un peu, je deviens un meilleur skieur et un meilleur sauteur. Je vais conserver cette manière de faire pour les Jeux olympiques, c'est sûr. (Carignan, 2013, p. 48) /

No, last year I won the World Cup. This year, in my races, it goes well like that since the beginning. So, I keep the same recipe. I always get a little better, I become a better skier and a better jumper. I will keep this way of doing (e.g., strategies and approaches to competitions) for the Olympic Games, for sure.

Kingsbury was clear about maintaining the way he did things because of the successes it brought him. He also referred to his way of training that worked well as he kept seeing improvement in his skiing and jumps. The different routines he developed brought a sense of familiarity with the process of training and competing that put Kingsbury in the right mind state for him to perform at his best at any time. He further mentioned that he was going to “keep this way of doing for the Olympic Games”, which inferred he thought his strategies and approaches to competition worked the best they could, even in the stressful Olympic environment.

Another strategy Kingsbury apparently enjoyed using in competition when he was the last performing in super final was to listen to his opponents scores to know what level of performance was needed to win the competition. This way, he created specific goals for the super final run. After winning the 2013 World Championships title, Kingsbury explained how he calculated with his coach that he would have been able to obtain a score of 27 to beat Bilodeau:

J'ai entendu le score d'Alexandre (Bilodeau) qui était de 26,95 et je savais donc qu'il avait fait une bonne descente avant moi pour être premier, mais avec mon entraîneur on a fait des calculs et nous savions que j'étais capable d'atteindre un score de 27 avec de bons sauts et de la vitesse. [...] Le message que je retiens, c'est que je suis capable de performer lors des événements qui sont importants, alors ça regarde très bien pour les Jeux olympiques. (Carignan, 2013, p. 48) /

I heard Alexandre (Bilodeau)'s score that was 26.95 and I knew that he had done a great run before me to be first, but with my coach we calculated and knew that I was able to attain a score of 27 with good jumps and speed. [...] The message I get from that is that I am able to perform [well] in important events so it looks really good for the Olympics.

Listening to opponents scores seemed to have been something helpful for Kingsbury who dealt with pressure remarkably. Indeed, it is like if Kingsbury was trying to optimally augment the pressure to balance his confidence and then perform at his best. Achieving such a performance while dealing with a major outcome (i.e., the title of World Champion during the Olympic year) added to the confidence he already had. That performance exemplified such mental strength on which he was then able to build from. He successfully made this strategy one to use in the future.

Finally, Dufour-Lapointe shared an interesting point when discussing the kind of support her and her sisters were providing each other. She mentioned that they were really close to each other and being together made a big difference when they travelled a lot, maybe because they did not miss their family as much because they were together (i.e., sisters providing each other family support). During the last event of the World Cup circuit for the 2012-2013 season, Dufour-Lapointe mentioned: “Moi, j'ai la chance d'avoir mes deux soeurs avec moi dans l'équipe. Nous formons un noyau très uni et cela aide vraiment beaucoup quand nous sommes à l'étranger pour une longue période, comme c'est le cas présentement” (Marois, 2013b, p. S5). / “Me, I am lucky to have my two sisters with me on the team. We are really close together and it helps a lot when we are abroad for a long period of time, like it is right now”. Her quote highlights that the Dufour-Lapointe sisters provided support to each other which helped them go through all of what traveling required to compete on the international stage. However, Dufour-Lapointe's words suggest that they could face an important adaption process if one or even two of them were to not travel with the others because of an injury or because they would not have qualified for a competition, where the usual support would not be present anymore.

In short, the preparation phase leading to the Olympic participation served to evaluate strategies and approaches athletes used so the more useful ones could be identified and

improved. The best practices could then be used during the Olympic Games by well-prepared athletes. Those strategies already proven to work for the athletes helped simplify the athletes' choices during a competition, put them in the proper mind-set and optimal zone of functioning, and know what type of support they would receive.

***Developing resiliency and learning from mistakes.*** Athletes' path throughout the Olympic season was not always a paved road to cruise on until the big moment. Athletes sometimes faced failures and they tried to get as much out of these situations as possible. Failures and poor performances provided as good or better lessons than victories, and athletes knew how valuable those lessons are and they used them to evolve.

Reflections on one's performances is a key component for learnings and improvements and St-Gelais provided a great example. St-Gelais discussed her strategies in the 500-metre races in October 2013: "Je commets des erreurs que je peux éviter, notamment lors des dépassements, et je mets beaucoup l'accent là-dessus" (Belley-Murray, 2013, p. 45). / "I make mistakes that I can avoid, including when passing [other skaters], and I put a big focus on that". Athletes must first recognize what can be changed to be able to improve. St-Gelais did exactly that. She knew what she had had issues with and worked on improving these aspects. She learned that her passing strategies were not optimal and was then working on improving them to become a more complete athlete.

In terms of resiliency, Dufour-Lapointe provided the best examples. Her first quote is from the 2013 World Championships held in March. After falling in the first round of qualifications, she was able to refocus and reach her optimal self to finish on the podium. Explaining her journey through this competition, she shared the following thoughts:

Je pense que c'est le défi le plus difficile que j'aie eu à relever en carrière, a-t-elle ajouté. Cette chute, je ne m'y attendais vraiment pas. Jamais je n'avais envisagé ce scénario. J'ai pleuré sans arrêt pendant deux minutes, puis je me suis ressaisie et je me suis dit, " Ce n'est pas terminé, relève-toi et redouble d'ardeur pour la deuxième manche, c'est ta dernière chance". J'ai tiré de cette expérience une énorme leçon, à savoir que je suis très forte et que même si je suis confrontée à une déception ou à un défi de taille, je peux toujours me relever et revenir en force. (La Presse Canadienne, 2013b, p. B6) /

I think that it is the most difficult challenge I ever had to overcome in my career. This fall, I really didn't expect it. I had never imagined this scenario. I cried non-stop for two minutes, then I recovered and told myself, "It's not over, get up and redouble your efforts for the second round, it's your last chance". I learned a tremendous lesson from this experience, which is that I am really strong and that even though I am facing a disappointment or great challenge, I can always get back on my feet and come back strong.

The outcome of the competition (i.e., World Championships medal) seemed to have motivated Dufour-Lapointe to use her resiliency skills as she had never done before. She mentioned that the challenge of getting back in the game after a fall during this competition was the biggest challenge she had overcome yet. Dufour-Lapointe's strategy to overcome this fall in the first round of qualification was not to block and avoid her disappointment, but to live her emotions and cry for two minutes so it could go away. Afterwards, she was able to refocus on what she had control over (i.e., her own performance) using self-talk. Coming back the way she did and finishing third of the 2013 World Championships made her stronger and more confident in her

skills, proving to herself that she had the ability to fight back and push herself to perform at her best to finish on the podium after underperforming.

The last quote from Dufour-Lapointe refers to the World Cup event of January 2014, less than a month before the Sochi Olympics. Because of how close it was from the Games, it seemed important for Dufour-Lapointe to have good results in this competition, which might partly explain why she was stressed but also able to put all this effort at coming back in the game after having committed errors in the qualifications. She described her comeback by saying that nothing was over until the end:

J'ai fait des erreurs en qualifications où j'ai fini 14<sup>e</sup>. Mais je me suis dit que ce n'était pas fini tant que ce n'était pas fini. J'ai voulu sortir le tigre en moi, skier pour moi et revenir aux bases. Ensuite, ç'a vraiment bien été. J'ai sorti deux grosses descentes, rapides, agressives, avec mon "360 mute", a ajouté Dufour-Lapointe, qui remportait sa deuxième course de la saison. De partir 14<sup>e</sup> et de terminer première, c'est vraiment cool. C'est une belle journée et je vais m'en rappeler longtemps. (PC, 2014, p. 30)

I did mistakes in qualifications where I finished 14<sup>th</sup>. But I told myself it wasn't over until it was over. I wanted to let the tiger out of myself, ski for myself and come back to the basis. Then, it went really well. I executed two big runs, fast, aggressive, with my "360 mute". To start 14<sup>th</sup> and finish first, it's really cool. It's a nice day and I will remember for a long time.

Dufour-Lapointe was able to keep developing her resiliency through this experience at the World Championships and to win the competition. Her ability to keep fighting and refocus was seen when she reminded herself that it was not too late to get back in the game. She shared letting the "tiger out" as a way to get back to her full potential. This image of a predator getting out of the

cage and aggressively attacking the course seemed to have equaled to the proper mindset to perform at the best of her abilities. Her refocus was aimed at going “back to the basics”, thus letting go of an unproductive self-talk that brought her attention away from what she needed to focus on. What seemed to have worked for Dufour-Lapointe was to simplify her focus and pay attention to the task she was accomplishing, rather than to the outcome. These positive emotions and the confidence gained from finishing strong after a setback seemed to have helped her gain confidence in her skills and helped her win the gold medal in the Sochi Olympics, a month later.

Setbacks were used by athletes as opportunities to prove themselves their mental strength. Confidence resulted from comebacks and helped the athletes learn that they could always perform at their highest level even after facing poor performances. The development of resiliency and learning from mistakes in the preparation phase was important because after learning about their capacities, the athletes knew that if a counter-performance would occur at the Games they would have the abilities to come back and finish on the podium because they would have done it during that season.

***Having goals for the different steps of the season.*** The athletes’ experiences that were explored suggested that Hamelin, St-Gelais, Kingsbury, and Dufour-Lapointe all had specific goals for the Olympic season in relation to other competitions than the Games such as the World Cup events and the World Championships. The athletes’ focus was thus not only on the Olympics but was spread over the different events of the season leading to and following the Olympic Games.

The establishment of high goals such as medaling in all distances participated in for Charles Hamelin had helped him achieve these goals. Hamelin accomplished extraordinary performances in one event of the World Cup circuit in Montreal in November 2009 by winning a

medal in all the distances he raced in, cumulating three individual medals (i.e., gold at the 500-metre, bronze at the 1000-metre, gold at the 1500-metre) and one team medal (silver at the 5000-metre relay).

Je voulais obtenir un maximum de podiums en fin de semaine et j'en ai quatre en quatre courses, avec deux médailles d'or, a raconté Hamelin. C'est ma meilleure performance en carrière dans une Coupe du monde et je l'ai réussie ici, à Montréal, devant mes parents, mes amis et les amateurs québécois. Je ne pouvais vraiment demander mieux. (Marois, 2009, p. 47) /

I wanted to obtain a maximum of podiums this weekend and I have four in four races, with two gold medals. It's my best performance in career in a World Cup, and I did it here, in Montréal, in front of my parents, my friends, and the Québec fans. I couldn't ask for better.

Hamelin shared the goals he had coming into that World Cup event in November 2009, which was to reach the podium in all of the distances he was going to race in, which he did. This highlights the use of goal setting for individual competitions, and not only in relation to the Olympics. Athletes have to go one step at the time and live the present moment. What this quote further suggests is that even though all competitions during the Olympic year can serve as a preparation for the Games, the focus has to be brought to individual competitions, one at the time.

The next quote reflects Kingsbury's focus on the overall World Cup season results and goal of finishing the season with the Crystal Globe, given to the athlete with the most points at the end of the season. His focus and determination to regain the yellow jersey (given to the



overall leader) from his rival Alexandre Bilodeau was seen when in January 2014 during a World Cup event he mentioned how crucial to him it was to get that jersey back:

J'ai perdu le maillot jaune de meneur aux mains d'Alexandre Bilodeau. Je suis encore vraiment proche de la position de tête. Je vais tout faire pour récupérer le maillot et pour ce faire, je n'ai qu'à gagner mes compétitions. Le plus important, c'est d'être le porteur du maillot jaune à la fin de la saison. (Kingsbury, 2014, p. 53) /

I lost the yellow jersey to Alexandre Bilodeau. I am still really close to the leading position. I will do all I can to get the jersey back, and to do so, all I have to do is to win my competitions. The most important, it's to be wearing the yellow jersey at the end of the season.

Even that close to the Olympic Games, less than a month away, Kingsbury's focus was on the present moment that represented at that time the World Cup circuit. Kingsbury's aspirations were quite high and he always wanted to win, no matter the competition. He especially wanted to win the overall ranking as seen in the previous quote. Thus, this quote is another example that during the Olympic year, everything is not only about the Olympics for the greatest athletes. The regular season also counts. This is important because that seemed to be what high achiever athletes do, always wanting to be among the best no matter the competition they take part of. Kingsbury's focus on getting the yellow jersey back reflected the constant focus to be number one. Having and developing this almost automatic focus on the first place in the preparation phase made it a habit that would then be implemented during the Olympics.

Finally, St-Gelais provided an example of goals linked to the Olympics but that are not directly about them. The quotas of number of athletes per country that can participate in the Olympics depends on the number of them ranked to a certain level and by the International

Olympic Committee quotas, which necessitates as many athletes as possible to reach that level for them to have more spots to participate in the different distances at the Olympics. Thus, the expectations from her team to qualify as many female skaters as possible seemed to have had an influence on St-Gelais' goals, where she had to avoid penalties and falls and needed to play safe rather than taking unnecessary risks. In preparation for the upcoming World Cup events in October 2013, St-Gelais commented on the history of her team to have been able to qualify the maximum number of skater (i.e., three) per distance: "Nous avons prouvé par le passé que nous sommes en mesure de classer trois patineuses parmi le top-32, mais nous ne sommes pas à l'abri de la malchance, a acquiescé St-Gelais. Nous devons donc nous montrer vigilantes lors des premières rondes" (Belley-Murray, 2013, p. 45). / "We proved in the past that we are able to qualify three skaters in the top-32, but we are never free of bad luck. We have to be vigilant during the first rounds". This quote from St-Gelais a few months before the 2014 Olympics shows that the Olympic Games influence athletes at different periods of the Olympic year, not only during the actual two weeks of the Olympics. This influence was shown when St-Gelais decided to change her approach to a competition and reduce the chances of falls and disqualifications. If she would not have had the clear goals to help her team having as many skaters qualified per distance, she could have skated in ways that would have been detrimental for her teammates, limiting their chances to participate in the Olympics. Thus, the establishment of goals was a useful strategy that helped sharpen St-Gelais' focus and approach to that one competition.

The establishment of specific goals not in relation to the Olympic outcomes was shared as being useful for achieving higher levels of success before the Games and as many spots on the several distances as possible. This focus on the different steps of the season was critical because

the athletes needed to focus on the present moment and the performances they had to accomplish. The included athletes being among the best Québec athletes in recent years all showed that the Olympics are not the only focus, even during the Olympic season. They lived the present moment and focused on one competition at the time, while at the same time keeping an eye on the overall results to maintain an edge over their competitors.

The building of self-confidence and the establishment of best practices seemed to have interacted in creating optimal circumstances for the athletes in their preparation for the Olympics. The confidence gained from the achievements (e.g., podiums) consolidated the establishment of higher and harder goals, which permitted the athletes to discover what worked best for them. Knowing what worked best for them then reinforced their confidence in their skills and abilities to achieve high level goals. Every time the athletes reached the podium, they gained confidence and learned one way of doing that worked. The establishment of best practice was also facilitated by coaches. Coaches helped athletes create strategies during competitions, where a positive coach-athlete relationship seemed to have eased the creation of successful strategies. When counter-performances were faced, the athletes who learned from them were able to enhance their skills and gain additional confidence. The early qualification was somewhat a source of confidence in itself as it proved a high level of accomplishment. The early qualification also released pressure for the following competitions knowing that the outcome did not matter as much as for an athlete who was not qualified yet. Thus, the preparation phase was about building athletes in multiple ways that would permit to have a strong foundation for the Olympics.

### **To the Olympic podium: Managing the magnitude of the Games**

The included athletes faced and overcame many challenges at the Olympic Games. Five themes were identified in this meta-transition to explain athletes' experiences at the Olympics.

The five themes are: 1) Having clear goals for the Olympics, 2) Facing and managing the distractions of the Games, 3) Building self-confidence during the Games, 4) Having and following performance and motivation plans and strategies, and 5) Managing the immediate results at the Games.

**Having clear goals for the Olympics.** All the included athletes shared specific goals they had for the Olympics they were taking part in. They also had different kinds of goals such as results/outcome and satisfaction goals. The two subthemes identified in this theme are 1) Aiming for the podium, and 2) Having other goals than just outcome goals.

***Aiming for the podium.*** The best athletes from Québec included in this study were all aiming at reaching the podium, and some of them were even more ambitious and shared goals about wanting to win nothing less than the Olympic gold medal. One exception is St-Gelais' goals for her first Olympics in 2010. Because she was training with the Sochi Games as her ultimate objective but ended up qualifying for the Vancouver Games, her goals for these latter Games were more modest. Even though St-Gelais had lower expectations for her first “unexpected” Olympics, she still had precise results goal for her individual distance (i.e., 500 m). She wanted to finish in the top 8. Once on the Olympic site, and two days prior to the 2010 Olympics, she mentioned: “Oui, je suis déjà montée sur le podium (en coupe du monde), mais je ne suis pas encore constante. Je vise davantage un top 8” (Saint-Pierre, 2010, p. 22). / “Yes, I have been on the podium (in World Cups), but I am still not constant. I aim more for a top 8”. This quote shows St-Gelais' result goal of finishing in the top 8, but also demonstrates her perception of herself as still not being fully developed as a complete skater, explaining her objective that was below what she could have foreseen in the future. Athletes' confidence level

and perception of their potential definitely affect the goals they set for their Olympic performances. St-Gelais added in the same interview:

Je vois toujours cela comme un bonus parce que mon objectif reste toujours 2014. Même si je vais participer aux Jeux olympiques de 2010, je reste toujours avec l'idée que ce ne sont pas mes derniers parce que ce n'était pas vraiment l'objectif que je visais. (Saint-Pierre, 2010, p. 22) /

I still see this as a bonus because my goal stays [the] 2014 [Olympics]. Even if I will participate in the 2010 Olympic Games, I keep in mind that they [2010 Olympics] won't be my last ones because they were not the goal I was aiming for.

The way she was seeing her participation at her first Olympics could have played against her because her modest goal could have led to a modest result. However, her goal of finishing in the top 8 for the Vancouver Olympics seemed to have helped her reduce the pressure off of her shoulders and perform better, leading to her individual Olympic silver medal at the 500-metre race and at the 3000-metre relay.

Dufour-Lapointe and her sisters had the dream and goal to be the three of them on the podium in Sochi 2014. After the three of them qualified for the Sochi Olympics, Justine Dufour-Lapointe mentioned: “Nous en sommes très fières, a déclaré Justine, la cadette des trois soeurs, qui vivra ses premiers Jeux. Nous aimerions bien nous retrouver toutes trois sur le podium” (Daigle, 2014b, p. 21). / “We are really proud about it. We would like to be the three of us on the podium”. This quote shows her result goal (i.e., podium), but also included a family goal that could have had the potential to distract the athletes if one of them would have had difficulty passing to the next rounds throughout the Olympics. However, the results demystify this theory because even though the older sister Maxime did not qualify for the super final (i.e., top six of

the 12 athletes from the final), Justine and Chloé both finished on the podium, in first and second place, respectively.

Hamelin's ambitions to get to the podium were expressed when he discussed his goals for the Sochi Olympics. In November 2013, Hamelin was very confident in his possibilities to reach the podium in every race he would take part of in the 2014 Olympics. He shared how his previous results allowed him to aim to reach the podium in all of his races:

Le début de la saison m'a confirmé que je n'avais aucune raison de douter de mes chances à Sotchi, a-t-il expliqué, dimanche, en conférence téléphonique. Je me sens très fort, très rapide aussi et j'ai acquis beaucoup d'assurance. Je suis confiant de pouvoir viser le podium dans toutes les épreuves auxquelles je participerai aux Jeux. (Marois, 2013c, p. S4) /

The beginning of the season confirmed that I had no reason to doubt my chances in Sochi. I feel really strong, really fast also, and I gained lots of assurance. I am confident to being able to aim for the podium in all the events I will take part of at the Games.

Hamelin's precise goals of medaling in the four events he was going to participate in were ambitious. He based his goals on his previous performances and feelings of strength and confidence coming from his great previous results. However, Hamelin's statement changed during the beginning of the Games. On February 13, 2014, one day after the opening ceremony, he identified adapted and more realistic goals: "Mon but est de me rendre en finale pour chaque distance et de gagner au moins une médaille. Si je reviens des Jeux avec deux médailles au cou, ce seront des Jeux clairement accomplis pour ma part. (Arcand, 2014, p. S5) / My goal is to reach the finale for each distances and to win at least one [individual] medal. If I come back from the Games with two medals around my neck, they will clearly be successful Games for me".

Hamelin's new goals could have been a way to better manage the pressure of the Olympics, and the potential disappointment that could come from not medaling in certain distances because of the uncertainties (e.g., falls, disqualifications) that are part of short track speed skating. Hamelin did not reach his goal but reached only one final, in the 1500-metre, where he won the gold medal.

Kingsbury on his part, had a very clear outcome goal. He wanted to win the only competition he had not won yet, aiming for the gold medal at the Sochi Games. Right after his performance which gave him the second place, Kingsbury said he was going for the first place, nothing less: "Je savais que ça allait être difficile à battre, mais je n'y allais pas pour finir deuxième, a assuré le skieur de Deux-Montagnes. Je vous le garantis, j'y allais pour gagner. C'est pour ça que j'ai fait une erreur" (Drouin, 2014a, p. S3). / I knew that it was going to be hard to beat that [Alexandre Bilodeau's score], but I was not going to go to finish second. I guarantee you, I was going for the win. That's why I did a mistake". Kingsbury's clear objective to win the gold medal made him adjust his performance and give everything he had to try to beat Bilodeau. Even though he finished second, he still was able to offer an incredible performance that was possible because of his willingness to win the gold medal.

Thus, clear goals were needed for the Olympics but goal setting did not guarantee their attainment. Lower goals permitted to reduce the pressure from medaling, but high goals gave additional motivation to do everything to reach the podium. What seemed important was to establish goals, whether higher or lower, according to the athletes' preferences and ability to deal with pressure.

***Having other goals than just outcome goals.*** Results goals appeared important for the four athletes but other kinds of goals were as, or even more, important. Mainly, satisfaction goals

for their Olympic performances were expressed by all athletes during their Olympic journey(s). Kingsbury shared that on top of the accomplishment goal of winning the gold medal in Sochi, he also wanted to produce the best performance he could ever do:

C'est sûr que je m'en vais là-bas en mission mais, en même temps, je veux apprécier le moment, a ajouté Kingsbury, principale menace au trône de Bilodeau. Je ne suis pas là juste pour gagner la médaille d'or, je veux avoir du plaisir. Je veux faire la descente de ma vie et je sais que si je fais la descente de ma vie, j'ai des chances de gagner la médaille d'or. (Daigle, 2014b, p. 21) /

It is sure that I am going there on a mission, at the same time, I want to appreciate the moment. I am not there only to win the gold medal, I want to have fun. I want to the run of my life and if I do the run of my life, I have chances to win gold.

Kingsbury's words suggest a specific focus on the process rather than solely on the outcome. He wanted to enjoy the process of performing at the Olympic Games focussing on the task at hand: executing the performance of his life. Only then would he be able to win the gold medal. Unfortunately, Kingsbury made one little mistake in his super final run, which placed him second with the silver medal.

Dufour-Lapointe's experience at the Sochi Games was similar in that she had the accomplishment goal of winning an Olympic medal but more importantly to give her everything and not have any regrets. In the media zone right after her gold medal performance, she declared how she had accomplished that goal of being fully satisfied with performance:

Quand je suis arrivée en bas, j'ai vraiment senti que j'avais tout donné. J'étais agressive, souple, plus rapide. C'est ce que je voulais accomplir: être satisfaite de la façon dont



j'avais skié. (...) C'est ce que je voulais faire: hausser mon niveau à chaque descente et de finir avec une descente dont je serai satisfaite pour toujours. (Daigle, 2014a, p. 30) /

When I arrived at the bottom, I really felt that I had given everything. I was aggressive, smooth, faster. That's what I wanted to accomplish: be satisfied with the way I was going to ski. (...) That's what I wanted to do: raise my level at each run and finish with a run I will always be satisfied with.

Dufour-Lapointe's performance answered her wishes of executing a performance she would be proud of. Even if she probably dreamt of winning the gold medal, she did not solely focus on the result. She focused on the process that led to the result she wanted, which was what she actually had to do to win the competition such as being in the present moment.

Finally, St-Gelais went along in saying that her main goal was to do the race of her life during the Vancouver Olympics. A few days before the opening ceremony, she stated: "Tout ce que je veux, c'est être fière de moi et avoir la satisfaction d'avoir fait la course de ma vie. Je ne veux pas sortir de ma course en ayant des regrets. (Saint-Pierre, 2010, p. 22) / All I want, it's to be proud of myself and have the satisfaction of having done the race of my life. I don't want to leave my race with regrets". Again, this goal of wanting to give her all seemed to have been the main focus no matter the results. Focussing on the process rather than the outcome might have helped St-Gelais reach the podium two times in 2010 (i.e., silver medals in 500-metre and 3000-metre relay).

The outcome of the Games was thus not the main focus of those Québec Olympians. Rather, they put their full attention on the process, on what needed to be done to attain their outcome goals. Most of those athletes focus on the process led to outcomes close or meeting

their expectations. This suggested that paying attention to what concretely needed to be done in was a successful approach to performing at one's best.

**Facing and managing the distractions of the Games.** The athletes included in this project seemed to have experienced a higher level of stress during the Olympics than during the regular season. However, they seemed to feel better emotionally and feel more in control once they got back to training at the Games or warming up for their performances.

The two subthemes in relation to facing and managing the distractions of the Games were: 1) Facing many sources of distraction at the Olympics, and 2) Establishing strategies to cope with the Games.

*Facing many sources of distraction at the Olympics.* The athletes shared some of the distractions that they faced, some being explicitly mentioned as harder to deal with and others that might not necessarily have represented a challenge to manage. Such distraction included the immensity of the Games and the high stress level it produced, seeing and living with all athletes including professional athletes, seeing a partner competing, and assuming a role of leader in the team.

Kingsbury discussed how that gigantism of the Games brought feelings of being somewhat shook. Discussing how he usually is in control of his thoughts and emotions during competitions, he mentioned how the stress he felt during the Sochi Olympics made it hard to sleep. Interviewed within a day after his performance and silver medal, Kingsbury referenced to the last few days as having been hard for to fall asleep because he was thinking too much: “Les dernières nuits n'ont pas été les plus faciles de ma vie... D'habitude, ça passe comme dans du beurre. Mais je pensais beaucoup. À un moment donné, je me suis dit qu'il fallait que j'arrête de

penser” (Drouin, 2014a, p. S3) / “The last nights haven’t been the easiest of my life... Usually, it goes like cutting through butter. But I was thinking a lot. At some point, I told myself I had to stop thinking”. Kingsbury, with his impressive accomplishments in the years before the Sochi Games proved that he was totally in control of his emotions and thoughts permitting him to reach the podium in almost all the competitions (e.g., World Cups, World Championships) he took part of. He even mentioned how in the “usual” competitions that he had taken part of he never had problems to sleep, but that at the Olympics it was a different story. Different reasons could explain the sleep disturbances caused by the continuous self-talk he experimented. Being the only competition he had never won and because of the rarity of this event, his dream to win the gold medal at the Olympic Games may have caused more stress. The special attention also received by many sports usually not as popular could also have contributed to his higher level of stress and self-talk.

Other sources of distraction that could have influenced Kingsbury and the other three athletes from the current study included living with athletes from all sport including professional athletes within whom they might have idols. Indeed, Kingsbury being a serious hockey fan was impressed to meet Sidney Crosby at the Canada house. Reflecting back in April 2014 on his participation in the Sochi Olympics, Kingsbury shared:

Les pros se mêlent à tout le monde. Ils sont au même niveau que nous et profitent des mêmes choses. C'est vraiment agréable. Je l'avais vu à la maison du Canada. Il mangeait avec sa famille. Je voulais prendre une photo avec lui mais je ne voulais pas le déranger, donc nous devons la prendre après. Ce qui n'est jamais arrivé. Avant d'entrer dans le stade pour la fermeture des Jeux, quelqu'un me touche l'épaule, c'est lui. Il me demande si

je veux toujours ma photo. Je ne m'attendais pas à ça. C'était vraiment gentil de sa part.  
(Rouleau, 2014, p. 43) /

The pros are mixed with everyone. They are at the same level then us and enjoy the same things. It's very pleasant. [...] I had seen him [Sidney Crosby] at the Canada house. He was eating with his family. I wanted to take a photo with him but I didn't want to bother him, so we were supposed to take it after. Which never happened. Before entering the stadium for the Games' closing ceremony, someone touch my shoulder, it's him. He asks me if I still want my photo. I didn't expect that. It was really nice of him.

Kingsbury did not mention if meeting Crosby was an important distraction, but meeting an idol usually implies some special feelings that could in the case of the Olympic Games play against an athlete's preparation. Kingsbury did not either specify if the first time he met Crosby was before or after his performance. Because Kingsbury competed on the third day of competition maybe he had already won the silver medal and seeing his idol did not influence his performance at all. However, the fact that amateur athletes share the same environment than professional athletes could lead to this additional distraction that happen only at the games to meet the most famous athletes, as shared by Kingsbury.

St-Gelais shared a more personal source of distraction about Charles Hamelin. As she used to be a couple with Hamelin up to March 2018, competing at the Olympics with her partner and Charles' brother (i.e., François Hamelin, also a speed skater on the Canadian Olympic team) added on the already existing distractions. St-Gelais discussed how stressed Hamelin was when she skated: "Charles est extrêmement stressé quand je patine. Maintenant qu'il sait que j'ai ma médaille, il peut se concentrer sur ce qu'il a à faire. Je pense qu'il est prêt à en mettre plein la vue" (Delbès, 2010b, p. 26) / Charles is extremely stressed when I skate. Now that he knows I

have my medal, he can focus on what he has to do. I think he is ready to show what he can do”. This quote suggests that Hamelin cared about St-Gelais’ results and might not have been able to focus as much on his own performances when she has not competed yet. It was only once she had medalled that he felt more comfortable worrying about himself only and the task he had to accomplish. Indeed, St-Gelais’ accomplishments might have influenced Hamelin’s performances and her success (e.g., silver medal at the 500-metre in Vancouver 2010) would allow him to forget about her and only focus on himself.

Finally, one last source of potential distraction refers to the team roles. Even though this research focuses on individual sport, athletes go to the Olympics with their team in which support is provided between teammates. Athletes play different roles and veterans are usually supportive of rookies. During the 2010 Olympics, Hamelin shared how he was gradually taking the role of leader within his team, being a role model by his great results on the World Cup circuit. In February 2010, two days before the opening ceremony, Hamelin shared:

Avec les années, j'ai appris à assumer petit à petit ce rôle, révèle celui qui a contribué à la médaille d'argent du relais masculin à Turin. En 2006, j'étais le plus jeune de l'équipe, le petit nouveau, celui qui avait encore beaucoup à apprendre. L'année suivante, j'étais déjà devenu un des meilleurs patineurs au Canada. À chaque année, j'ai pris ce rôle un peu plus au sérieux. Cette année, mes résultats sur le circuit de la Coupe du monde démontrent que j'assume bien mon rôle. Et j'essaie aussi d'aider l'équipe pour que tout le monde ait de bons résultats. (Delbès, 2010a, p. 54) /

With the years, I learned to assume more and more this role [leader]. In 2006, I was the youngest of the team, the newbie, the one that still had a lot to learn. The next year, I had already become one of the best skaters in Canada. [...] Every year, I took this role

[leader] a little more seriously. This year, my results on the World Cup circuit show that I play this role well. And I also try to help the team for everyone to have good results.

Hamelin seemed confident with this evolving role of a leader. However, such a role could have resulted in more pressure to show the right example by winning and could have become a distraction. Feeling like letting the team down when poor performances would occur was another possible outcome of this role. Nonetheless, Hamelin medalled in all the Olympic Games he participated in, which could definitely inspire his teammates.

Multiple sources of distraction exist at the Games and athletes have to get over them to reach the podium. Some distractions are exclusive to the Games and those seems the harder to overcome. Because it seemed impossible to know exactly what to expect and to be prepared face such stress and anxiety for the athletes' first Olympics, it seemed like the best way for athletes to deal with Olympic distraction was to have an optimal support system during the Games and have planned specific coping strategies.

***Establishing strategies to cope with the Games.*** Because of the tremendous demands, stress, and expectations put on athletes during the Olympic Games, as discussed in the previous section, athletes must develop strategies to cope with these pressures. The different sources of distractions necessitate different coping strategies. The first quote presents the overload that athletes may feel at the Olympics, especially when it is their first participation. Reflecting back on his first Olympics in Torino 2006, Charles Hamelin shared how he managed to deal with the immensity of the Games by dividing tasks in smaller ones to permit a better focus: “J’étais tellement jeune que j’ai été déstabilisé, admet-il. Tout était gros, tout était impressionnant. On se concentrait sur de petites choses, de petits moments spécifiques. Tu essaies d’oublier l’ampleur de la chose et de te concentrer sur ton travail” (Arcand, 2014, p. S5). / “I was so young that I got

destabilized. Everything was huge, everything was impressive. We would focus on little things, little specific moments. You try to forget the magnitude of the thing and focus on your work”. Feeling destabilized by the nature and implications of the event, Hamelin used the strategy to go one step at the time, divide bigger task into small ones and target his focus on the present moment. Because so many distractions are present at the Games, this strategy to concentrate on one element seemed to have somewhat worked for Hamelin who won a silver medal in the 5000-metre relay in the Torino Olympics.

The coping process with the Games can also be eased by teammates. Veterans’ experiences can be shared with rookies who can then use these experiences as learning tools and better cope with the Olympic distractions. Two days before the 2010 Olympics, Marianne St-Gelais was asked about whether she was taking advantage of her boyfriend’s (i.e., Charles Hamelin) Olympic experience. She disclosed:

Oui, il m'a aidé sur certains points, mais ce sera vraiment sur place qu'il pourra m'aider.

Par exemple s'il voit que je suis trop emballée et que je ne suis plus vraiment dans ma bulle. C'est à ce moment que les vétérans comme lui, Tania Vicent, Kalyna Roberge, vont interagir pour qu'on retrouve notre focus. (Saint-Pierre, 2010, p. 22) /

Yes, he helped me on certain aspects, but it will really be on site that he will be able to help me. For example, like if he sees that I am too excited and that I am not anymore in my bubble. It’s at that moment that veterans like him, Tania Vicent, Kalyna Roberge, will intervene so we can regain our focus.

St-Gelais shared this strategy that seems to be external where people would intervene to bring her back to a more appropriate mindset and activation level. We could guess that she would also ask the veterans for advice rather than just receiving them when veterans would see her in a sub-

optimal state. Social support from teammates thus seemed to be an important source of coping strategies even in individual sports, where the wish to see one's teammates success seemed to be part of the Canadian short track speed skating team sport culture.

Finally, one last example of general coping strategies, also shared by St-Gelais, referred to bringing with her some sort of lucky charm and photos. Asked if she had was brining anything special in her suitcases for the Vancouver Olympics, she indicated that:

Les photos de mon chum (Charles) parce qu'on ne se verra pas souvent même si nous sommes dans le même condo au Village olympique. À l'aréna, j'aurai aussi avec moi une chaîne que ma grand-mère maternelle [...] m'a donnée. (Saint-Pierre, 2010, p. 22) /

Photos of my boyfriend (Charles) because we won't see each other often even if we are in the same building at the Olympic Village. At the arena, I will also have with me a chain that my maternal grand-mother [...] gave me.

The photos and chain were presented by St-Gelais as playing a role of positive anchor during the Olympics, as a source of comfort and motivation. The chain could also have represented a source of luck or good energy that she would want to benefit from during the Games. The use of anchors was to be a method helping Marianne cope with her emotions whilst it fostered an optimal emotional state.

Various coping strategies were shared by the included athletes. Such strategies were dividing bigger tasks in smaller ones, using support from teammates, and using positive anchors such as photos of loved ones. Although not an exhaustive list, the aforementioned strategies seemed to have somewhat helped the athletes focus on their tasks, reducing the potential effect of various distractions and sources of stress and anxiety.



**Building self-confidence during the Games.** Self-confidence was mentioned as having helped with optimal Olympic performance. Self-confidence appeared to come from the athletes themselves and also from their coaches' support. The two unique subthemes identified in this theme are 1) Believing in yourself, and 2) Having a positive relationship with one's coach makes things easier.

***Believing in yourself.*** The athletes highlighted the role of confidence during the Olympic Games. Various ways were used to discuss the importance of confidence and how it was implemented in their performances. Examples from St-Gelais and Hamelin are provided. Even at their first Olympics, the included athletes knew they had the potential to reach the podium. St-Gelais who's main goal was to qualify for the Sochi Olympics multiple years later ended up qualifying for the Vancouver Games. Even though she was somewhat surprised of herself, she believed she could win an Olympic medal. Two days before the beginning of the 2010 Games, St-Gelais shared:

Une médaille, c'est possible. Je l'ai fait en Coupe du monde - justement à Vancouver en 2008. Est-ce que je vais être capable de le reproduire ici, je ne sais pas? Mais je sais que j'en suis capable. Une chose est sûre, je ne laisserai pas la médaille me filer entre les doigts. (Delbès, 2010a, p. 54) /

A medal, it's possible. I've done it in the World Cup – precisely in Vancouver in 2008. Will I be able to reproduce this here, I don't know? But I know I can do it. One certain thing is that I will not let the medal slip through my fingers.

The fact that she believed she could win a medal already brought her closer to one. This belief came from the confidence she acquired throughout the season by winning medals on the international scene, then knowing that she had the abilities to compete for a medal with the best

skaters of the planet during the biggest sport event. The latter quote further shows the determination she had in winning an Olympic medal. She mentioned that if she were to get close to a medal, by reaching a final for example, she would not “let the medal slip through [her] fingers”, would grasp on it and push back her limits to get it, which she ended up doing, winning two silver medals (i.e., one individual medal in the 500-metre, and a team medal on the 3000-metre relay) at her first Olympics in Vancouver 2010. However, this determination is only possible if she first believed she could have done it, without which she would not have put in all the necessary effort to beat the best speed skaters of world.

Being confident and believing one can reach the podium is not the only important thing. Hamelin shared that too much confidence is not optimal for his performances. A balance is required between confidence and stress levels to trigger the best out of him. After winning the gold medal in the 1500-metre race in the Sochi Olympics, Hamelin declared: “Le stress était là, mais la confiance l'a contrebalancé, a-t-il dit. Pour moi, c'est la combinaison idéale. C'est à ce moment que je suis à mon mieux” (Cantin, 2014b, p. S2). / “The stress was there, but the confidence counterbalanced it. For me, that’s the ideal combination. It’s at that moment that I am at my best”. Hamelin showed that for him performing at the Olympics was not about having the highest level of confidence possible but having the best individual balance between confidence and stress. Too much or not enough confidence seemed to have not fostered an optimal focus and activation level which could then have led to errors during performances.

Finally, Hamelin discussed his high confidence of skating against anyone because of his knowledge of his opponents’ strengths and weaknesses. Such awareness allowed him to have an idea of the optimal strategy to adopt according to his competitors, leading to higher feelings of control and confidence. After winning the gold medal at the 1500-metre at the 2014 Olympics,

Hamelin explained: “Je suis sur le circuit depuis 2003 et je les connais par coeur, avec leurs forces et leurs faiblesses, a-t-il expliqué. Dans ma tête, j’ai un aperçu de la course avant qu’elle commence” (Cantin, 2014b, p. S2). / “I am on the circuit since 2003 and I know them [opponents] by heart, with their strengths and weaknesses. In my head, I have a preview of the race before it starts”. Hamelin had feelings of confidence because he considered knowing his opponents and thus had an idea of what to do to beat them in the races. This reflected his beliefs in his own capacities to perform at his best and beat his opponents.

Confidence levels appeared to be decisive for the athletes’ performances at the Olympics. They needed a high level of confidence but a balance with stress levels seemed to foster optimal performances. Believing in oneself permitted the athletes to feel in control of themselves and take the necessary steps towards medaling at the Olympics.

***Having a positive relationship with one’s coach makes things easier.*** The coach-athlete relationship was implicitly and explicitly acknowledged to impact athletes’ performances at the Games. Positive coach-athlete relationships were shared by Hamelin and St-Gelais from which the benefits were highlighted.

Answering why he chose to take the lead half way in the 1500-metre final of the 2014 Olympics, Hamelin said that he followed his instinct, especially because his coach always reassured and confirmed that his was right. Hamelin affirmed: “Mon instinct, a-t-il répondu plus tard. Mon entraîneur me répète toujours que le mien est très sûr. Alors j’ai foncé...” (Cantin, 2014b, p. S2). / “My instinct. My coach always repeated me that mine is very sure. So I went for it...”. The confidence and trust coming from Hamelin’s coach support in relation to his instinct permitted Hamelin to exploit this ability and win the gold medal. If such support were to not have been provided, Hamelin could have shown hesitation in following his instinct and lose

precious opportunities to perform at his best. Coaches' support and evaluation of their athletes' strengths seems to positively impact their performances.

St-Gelais, on the other hand, shared how she needed to discuss about a counter-performance with her coach to help get over it before the relay that was coming up. During the Sochi Olympics, after being eliminated in the first rounds of the 1000-metre, St-Gelais confided her disappointment and fear of not to be picked for the relay to her coach:

J'étais déçue, mais je ne voulais pas que les filles paient pour ce qui m'était arrivé au 1000, a affirmé St-Gelais. Mais je ne pouvais pas refouler ça. J'ai pris le temps de discuter avec l'entraîneur Frédérick Blackburn. Pour lui, il n'y avait aucun doute que je serais du relais. Il voulait juste s'assurer que je tournerais la page. (Laflamme, 2014b, p. S2) /

I was disappointed, but I didn't want the girls to pay for what had happened to me at the 100-metre. But I couldn't repress it. I took time to discuss with coach Frédérick Blackburn. For him, there was no doubt that I would be part of the relay. He just wanted to make sure I would turn the page on this chapter.

St-Gelais' positive relationship with her coach allowed her to feel comfortable sharing her worries with him, which permitted her to get over her disappointment and be fully ready for the relay. She shared the need to share her feelings with someone and chose her coach as a proof of great trust. Their close relationship also seemed to have allowed Blackburn to read into St-Gelais' mental state to realize that even with her important disappointment from the 1000-metre race she was still going to be able to help the relay team to win a medal, which they ended up doing. This quote proved that the close coach-athlete relationship St-Gelais experienced had a positive impact on her performances.

In short, a positive and helpful coach-athlete relationship helped providing tools for the athletes and promoting a full and healthy development. Such tools were then used during the Olympics helping to reach the podium. The close coach-athlete relationship also permitted to know each other in depth and make informed decisions. Thus, the positive coach-athlete relationship enhanced the chance of the athletes to reach the podium by the adapted decision-making processes used during the Olympics.

**Having and following performance and mental plans and strategies.** The athletes mentioned having specific plans for the Games in general and in the ways they wanted to compete (e.g., types of jumps and aggression depending of the round), but they also shared creating strategies for each race depending of their opponents. The adaptation of their strategies during their performances (more for short track speed skating) was also a crucial part in achieving success (i.e., podium). The athletes also shared various sources of motivation to compete at the Games. Two subthemes we created accordingly: 1) Having and following a precise strategy for each race, and 2) Having mental plans.

***Having and following a precise strategy for each race.*** Athletes performances at the Games were not left to luck. Athletes created plans and strategies for each performance. Following well developed strategies can lead to success, as shared by Hamelin in the following quote where after winning the gold medal at the 1500-metre race in Sochi 2014 Olympics, he stated: “C'est une journée parfaite. J'ai suivi mon plan à la lettre. Et j'ai vraiment montré que j'étais le plus fort” (La Presse Canadienne, 2014a, p. 24). / “It's a perfect day. I followed my plan to the letter. I really showed that I was the strongest”. Following the pre-established strategy precisely allowed Hamelin to perform at his best and surpass everyone in the 1500-metre race. This further shows that his strategy was well developed and adapted to the opponents he was

facing. Hamelin's extensive experience on the short track speed skating circuit permitted him to know his opponents in depth and thus create strategies giving him the most chance of winning.

St-Gelais also provided an insightful example of having a precise strategy during a race. Sharing her experience of the 500-metre in the 2010 Olympics, she mentioned how she held on to her strategy until the end:

La stratégie en finale, c'était de rester le plus près de Wang, a-t-elle analysé. Mais elle est extrêmement rapide. J'avais beau patiner dans des temps que j'atteins rarement, elle gardait l'avance. "Quand j'ai vu qu'elle se détachait et qu'elle prenait l'avance, mon objectif c'était de regarder ses fesses et je me disais va la chercher. Ça m'a motivé à continuer à foncer. (Delbès, 2010b, p. 26) /

The strategy in the final, it was to stay as close as possible to Wang. But she is extremely fast. Even though I was skating in times I rarely reach, she would stay ahead of me.

When I saw that she was breaking away, my goal was to look at her butt and I was telling myself go get her. It motivated me to keep pushing.

Because St-Gelais had created her strategy for this final race and the opponents she was facing, she was able to stick with her plan until the end. Even though the other skater (i.e., Wang) was breaking away, St-Gelais kept her focus on staying as close to her as possible, leading to St-Gelais' first Olympic medal.

Having plans and strategies was insufficient to maximize one's chance to reach the podium. Because opponents also trained hard, are giving their best, and are aiming for the podium, athletes had to adapt their strategies during their performances to surpass their opponents. The environment might also be different than what athletes are used to, especially during finals where the crowd sometimes gets very loud, potentially affecting athletes'

concentration. Hamelin's usual strategy to lead the whole race (presented in subtheme Reconsidering/creating patterns of success) did not pay off at the 1000-metre of the 2010 Olympics because he was unable to adapt his strategy to the environment, even though it usually worked well for him. Hamelin explained:

La stratégie était d'aller en avant et de se donner une bonne vitesse, a expliqué Charles après la course. Mais j'ai été trop vite. Avec la foule et le bruit, j'avais de la difficulté à entendre les gens derrière moi et de voir où ils étaient. Ça fait en sorte que j'ai utilisé trop d'énergie et que j'ai manqué de jus à la fin. [...] Cette stratégie marche assez souvent pour moi. Je sais que je suis capable de mener de bout en bout. C'est juste la vitesse au début qui m'a tué. (Bégin, 2010, p. S8) /

The strategy was to go in the front and give myself good speed. But I went too fast. With the crowd and the noise, I had a hard time to hear people behind me and see where they were. It made me use too much energy and have not enough jus at the end. [...] This strategy often works for me. I know I can lead from one end to the other. It's just the speed at the beginning that killed me.

Hamelin's inability to adapt his strategy to the Olympic environment with a mostly Canadian crowd that was loudly cheering for him being in the lead played against him. Thus, when using a strategy previously used in the regular season, athletes at the Olympics must bring changes to better fit the Olympic context and plan various version of their strategy for potential sources of distractions such as a very loud crowd.

The necessity to have a strategy during an Olympic performance was highlighted by the athletes. Having a strategy provided the athletes with an idea of what to do in their races and how to do it, reducing to some extent the number of decisions to make during the performance. Most

importantly was to have the mental alertness to adapt the strategy to the moment with quick decision making, as Hamelin learned the hard way. Hence, having a strategy during the Olympics permitted to know what to do during races but the need to re-evaluate it during as the race went one was crucial to reaching to the podium.

***Having mental plans.*** The athletes shared a variety of motivation sources and strategies for the different periods of their participation in the Olympics. Both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation were shared to be used during the Games. Motivation and confidence levels might include ups and downs depending on the performances during the Games for athletes who had multiple events to take part of (i.e., Hamelin and St-Gelais). After falling during the qualifications of the 1000-metre during the 2014 Olympics and seeing her boyfriend Charles Hamelin falling in the qualifications of the 500 m, St-Gelais felt really low. It created a bad mindset for competing in the relay with her teammates that was coming up. She then used her motivation to not let her teammates down for the relay to change her focus from her previous poor performance and be mentally sharp for this upcoming race. After winning the silver medal with her teammates at the relay, she explained:

Ç'a été vraiment dur pour moi, se souvient St-Gelais. Il fallait que je tourne la page parce qu'en aucune façon je voulais faire payer ces filles-là. On s'est tellement entraînées longtemps ensemble, on a fait tellement de sacrifices. Je me disais: non, non, non, je n'arrive pas dans le relais avec une attitude de merde. (Drouin, 2014b, p. S5) /

It has been really hard for me. I had to move on because I did not want to make those girls [teammates] pay. We trained together for so long, we made so many sacrifices. I was telling myself: no, no, no, I'm not coming into the relay with a shitty attitude.



In this quote, St-Gelais used partly an external source of motivation, not wanting to let her teammates down, to change her mindset and arrive mentally sharp for the relay. This quick mental change shows St-Gelais' mental toughness and ability to control her thoughts and emotions, an important ability for being among the best athletes. She also mentioned all the work and sacrifices they have done to get to the Olympics where this intrinsic source of motivation seemed to have helped her have go back to an optimal mind state.

Motivation was also taken from the crowd. Once in Vancouver and two days before the opening ceremony of the 2010 Olympics, Hamelin shared his excitement for this event and discussed how powerful it was going to be to walk in the stadium under the cheers of a mainly Canadian crowd, even more than what he experienced in Torino for the 2006 Olympics:

La cérémonie d'ouverture, c'est incroyable. Je me souviens à Turin quand je suis entré dans le stade. Tout le monde applaudit et nous prend en photo. Nous, on leur envoie la main. Quand les Italiens sont entrés, c'était fou l'ambiance. "Je ne peux même pas imaginer comment ça va être au Canada. Je veux vivre cette ambiance, avoir l'adrénaline que ça procure pour me mettre dedans pour le lendemain. (La Presse Canadienne, 2010a, p. 45) /

The opening ceremony, it's incredible. I remember in Torino when I walked into the stadium. Everyone cheers and take photos of us. We wave at them. When the Italians walked in, the ambiance was nuts. I can't even imagine how it will be in Canada. I want to live this ambiance, have the adrenaline it produces to get into the mood for the day after.

Hamelin wanted to use the energy from the crowd and the motivation it created in him to be in the right mood to perform better. Interestingly, Hamelin did not have the beginning of the Games

he was hoping for, but finished strong with two gold medals (i.e., 500-metre and 5000-metre relay) within 30 minutes during his last day of competition. This suggested that the extrinsic focus used by Hamelin was not useful.

Finally, Dufour-Lapointe provided a great example of intrinsic motivation during the Olympic performance. The day after her performance leading her to the highest step of the podium, she shared her key sentence that she was repeating in her head right before taking the course: “C'est mon moment, j'aime skier et je vais le faire pour moi” (Cantin, 2014a, p. S1) / “It's my moment, I love skiing, and I will do it for myself”. Dufour-Lapointe's key sentence highlights the appropriation of the moment and performance, linking her performance to her own pleasure and enjoyment. Intrinsic motivation is seen when she mentioned “I will do it for myself”, as a way to manage the pressure and find deep and personal meaning to competing at the Olympics. Her motivation seemed to have positively impacted her performance because she won the gold medal at the Sochi Games.

Extrinsic motivation seemed to have been useless during the Olympics such as Hamelin's focus on getting cheered for during the opening ceremony. On the other hand, Dufour-Lapointe provided an insightful example of how the intrinsic motivation at the Games helped leading to successful performance. A mix of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation could also have been helpful as it was for St-Gelais. However, the athletes' experiences suggested intrinsic motivation as having more impact on athletes' success at the Olympics than extrinsic motivation.

**Managing the immediate results at the Games.** No matter how they performed, athletes needed to deal with the results whether they considered them successful or not. The ways they managed their success(es) and/or failure(s) were even more decisive when athletes participated in several races (e.g., short track speed skating) where the results of one race could

have influenced the progress of the next ones. There was less immediate impact of the management of the results for moguls skiers as they only had one discipline at the Olympics (i.e., single moguls). Thus, the two subthemes created for this theme are 1) Managing success, and 2) Managing disappointment/poor performances.

***Managing success.*** In relation to the Olympic Games in which the athletes participated (i.e., Torino, Vancouver, and Sochi), Charles Hamelin won three gold medals and one silver medal, Marianne St-Gelais won three silver medals, Mikaël Kingsbury won one silver medal and Justine Dufour-Lapointe won one gold medal. However, their personal satisfaction of their performances might not all be defined as successful because of the high expectations they had (e.g., Kingsbury was aiming for the gold medal but ended up with the silver medal), but we still consider that medalling at the Olympics is a colossal achievement.

Because the Olympics are placed on a pedestal and because of their rarity (i.e., every four years), athletes' results at the Games are of great importance. When reaching the podium, athletes shared having had hard times believing they had achieved such a dream, as shown by Dufour-Lapointe after winning the Olympic gold medal: “Je suis encore sous le choc, a d'abord lancé la gagnante dans la zone mixte. Je ne le réalise pas présentement, c'est fou” (Daigle, 2014a, p. 30) / “I am shocked. I can't believe it, it's crazy”. Dufour-Lapointe's reaction is far from being unique. St-Gelais also expressed such amazement from her accomplishment after winning her first Olympic silver medal:

Une deuxième place, c'est plus qu'un rêve, a-t-elle reconnu. Oui, j'en prends conscience car je revois la reprise de ma course aux 10 minutes à la télévision. Mais quand je vais tenir la médaille dans mes mains [...] je vais sans doute le réaliser pleinement. (Delbès, 2010b, p. 26) /

A second place, it's more than a dream. Yes, I realize it because I see the replay of my race every 10 minutes on the television. But when I will hold my medal in my hands [...] I will probably fully realize it.

As St-Gelais presented, winning an Olympic medal was a tremendous accomplishment that was hard to fully realize until you have the medal in your hands. The medal ceremony was therefore an important event bringing the dream to life. The reaction to medalling at the Games is worth mentioning especially for athletes who have other competitions to take part of afterwards because of the refocussing skills they have to show.

Other outcomes of success at the Olympics include recognition. winning an Olympic medal represents having more visibility, for athletes practicing sports that do not necessarily receive much coverage outside of the Olympics, and being recognized and congratulated by other athletes including by professional athletes. Asked if her life had changed after winning the silver medal at the 500 metre race in 2010, St-Gelais disclosed: “Marc-André Fleury m'a serré la main aujourd'hui dans l'ascenseur. Wow! Il m'a dit félicitation, tu as fait une belle course. C'est le fun de se faire reconnaître” (Delbès, 2010b, p. 26) / “Marc-André Fleury shook my hand today in the elevator. Wow! He told me congratulation, you did a good race. It's nice to be recognized”. St-Gelais expressed excitement from being congratulated by Fleury and recognized. However, by participating in multiple events, she had to deal with this success and keep an optimal activation level and focus. After winning the silver medal at the relay in the Vancouver Olympics, St-Gelais proved she was able to manage her success.

Dealing with the fame brought from medaling at the Olympics is another important step for athletes. Responding on how she was going to deal this fame, St-Gelais mentioned wanting to stay the same as she is: “Je veux rester la fille simple et souriante que je suis. Ça m'a toujours

rapport dans la vie. Si je change, ce ne sera plus la Marianne que les gens connaissent” (Delbès, 2010b, p. 26). / “I want to stay the simple and smiling girl I am. It always has brought me good in life. If I change, it won’t be the Marianne that people know”. St-Gelais showed how for her, winning an Olympic medal would not change who she is. She shared values of humility and low ego traits by wanting to stay the person people know and like. Staying true to herself was the approach she took in dealing with her fame.

Dealing with success is also important when other races have to be completed. Athletes have to get back to their optimal arousal and focus level to produce other great performances. During the last day of the Olympics and after winning two gold medals (i.e., 500-metre, 5000-metre relay), Hamelin shared how he had developed the strength of not letting a victory or poor performance distract him from his upcoming tasks. Hamelin also mentioned having the ability to refocus on the task at hand between performances to be at his full potential: “Une de mes qualités, c'est que je ne me laisse pas distraire facilement par mes défaites et déceptions. Même si je gagne une course, je ne me laisse pas emporter par la victoire. Du moins, lorsque je deviens un peu trop excité, je suis capable de revenir les deux pieds sur terre afin de me concentrer sur le travail qu'il reste à faire” (La Presse Canadienne, 2010b, p. 54) / “One of my qualities, it’s that I don’t get easily distracted by my failures et disappointments. Even if I win a race, I don’t let myself carried away by the victory. At least, when I become a little too excited, I am able to come back down to earth to focus on the work that remains to be done”. Having to navigate between two poor performances (i.e., 500-metre and 1000-metre) and one gold medal (i.e., 1500-metre) during the 2010 Olympics, Hamelin had to exploit this quality of his to remain in control of his activation level and focus, which it seems like he did after winning the gold medal in the 5000-metre relay with his three teammates.

Another important element that the athletes identified is the importance of good sportsmanship. Most of the included athletes acknowledged their opponents and showed the importance of maintaining good relationships with them. A great example of a healthy competition is the one between Mikaël Kingsbury and Alexandre Bilodeau, two moguls skiers from Québec who trained together and had the same goal of winning the gold medal at the Sochi Olympics. Bilodeau was aiming at a second consecutive gold medal after winning at the Vancouver Games, while Kingsbury was going for a first Olympic medal. After finishing second behind Bilodeau, Kingsbury still took time to praise Bilodeau and acknowledge the quality of his performance, even though he had “stolen” his dream of becoming Olympic champion. Soon after his performance in the super final, Kingsbury commented: “[Alexandre] a fait une descente incroyable. [...] Avec ses deux médailles d'or, ça fait d'Alex le plus grand skieur acrobatique de tous les temps” (La Presse Canadienne, 2014b, p. B4). / “[Alexandre] did an incredible run. I knew it was going to be hard to beat, but I was not going to for the second place tonight, I guarantee you. [...] With his two gold medals, it makes Alex the greatest freestyle skier of all times”. This showed Kingsbury’s ability to manage his success of medaling at the Games and at the same time the failure of not being number one. Even though defeated, he took time to acknowledge his rival’s performance and accomplishment.

Finally, the last element athletes may have faced when dealing with success referred to the visibility and opportunities that came with reaching the podium at the Olympics. Winning an Olympic medal attracted potential sponsors and partnerships with private companies. Such opportunities could also be triggered by the athletes themselves during the various interviews done after winning a medal at the Games. Such visibility represented a great opportunity to suggest partnerships, such as the way Dufour-Lapointe did when she mentioned, after winning

the gold medal at the Sochi Games: “C'est le début d'un nouveau chapitre pour nous, reconnaît Justine. On est des athlètes, mais aussi des filles. On adore la mode, le maquillage... On aimerait créer notre propre marque destinée à des jeunes” (Cantin, 2014a, p. S1). / “It's the beginning of a new chapter for us. We are athletes, but we are also girls. We love fashion, make-up... We would like to create our own brand aimed for youth”. This suggested that managing success at the Olympics included dealing with additional opportunities for income, which was profitable, especially for amateur athletes. Potential partnerships were important because they were going to assure athletes financial future for the following months or years, which was part of athletes' life.

Therefore, managing success was hard to do when accomplishing the dream to become an Olympic medalist. Dealing with success was essential for St-Gelais and Hamelin at the Games because they had other performances to achieve and needed an optimal focus. The athletes' ego was boosted and they could use it as a source of confidence. No matter the success, the athletes showed sportsmanship and emphasised its relevance. Dealing with success included having more sponsorship opportunities which was welcomed by the athletes to help their financial situation as amateur athletes.

***Managing disappointments/poor performances.*** Managing disappointments is also a part of the Olympic experience, but mainly for the included speed skaters because they had multiple chances to medal in every Olympic Games they took part of. Because the included athletes had high expectations such as medaling in all events they were taking part in, disappointments include not being able to medal in one or many distances.

Different coping strategies were used by the athletes to manage their disappointments. First, St-Gelais was unable to reach the final in her first and favorite event (i.e., 500-metre) in the Sochi Games. Her disappointment was clear, but she stayed positive by reminding herself that

she had two more opportunities to medal individually than she had in the Vancouver Olympics. St-Gelais declared: “Je suis déçue, mais je ne m'en fais pas trop, a-t-elle commenté. Je me dis que j'ai d'autres chances de me reprendre. Aux Jeux de Vancouver, je ne prenais part qu'aux 500 et au relais féminin. Ici, il y a les 1000 et 1500 mètres qui s'en viennent, à part le relais” (La Presse Canadienne, 2014c, p. 29). / “I am disappointed, but I’m not too worried. I tell myself that I have other opportunities to bounce back. At the Vancouver Games, I was only part of the 500 and women’s relay. Here, there are the 1000 and 1500 metre that are coming, else than the relay”. St-Gelais’ decided to focus on the upcoming races and let go of the past as a way of coping. Her hopes were based on the fact that she had twice as many opportunities to medal in Sochi than she had in Vancouver (i.e., two opportunities in the 2010 Games and four in the 2014 Games).

Second, the level of disappointment is sometimes more important than other times and the way it might be dealt with will change accordingly. For example, Hamelin had great hopes to finish on the podium in his three individual races during the Sochi Olympics. He started strong by winning the gold medal the 1500-metre, but afterwards he fell without contact of opponents or any obvious reason in both the 1000-metre and 500-metre, one after the other. After his fall in his last individual event (i.e., 500-metre) of the Sochi Games, Hamelin had to let his anger come out. Reflecting back on his 500-metre race in March 2014, he shared: “Disons que j'ai détruit une poubelle, un séchoir, une porte, de la céramique... Ça m'a aidé à libérer un peu ce qu'il y avait en dedans de moi” (Drouin, 2014b, p. S5). / “Let’s say that I destroyed a garbage, a dryer, a door, and ceramic... It helped me free a little bit of what was inside of me”. Hamelin had the need to let out his emotions of frustration and anger, which he did this by destroying material from a bathroom so he could overcome that poor performance and focus on the upcoming relay race as a



coping strategy. As he explicitly mentioned, this process was beneficial for him to get over the frustration, giving him the chance to focus on the upcoming relay. However, his brother fell during the semi-final so the team did not qualify for the final. Reflecting on his full Olympic experience in Sochi, once all his races were over, he shared: “Ce n'est pas la fin du monde. J'ai gagné l'or au 1500. J'ai hâte aux Championnats du monde de Montréal (en mars). Je vais montrer aux gens que c'était de la malchance” (Laflamme, 2014a, p. 39). / “It's not the end of the world. I won gold on the 1500. I can't wait to the Montréal World Championships (in March). I will show people that it was bad luck”. The way Hamelin decided to manage his overall poor performances at the Sochi Olympics was to let emotions come out and switch his focus to the next important competition, the World Championships the next month, and hope to prove people what he was really capable of.

Coping with disappointment was crucial for the athletes who had multiple events to take part of during the Olympics. Even though the four included athletes all had success at the Olympics, some of them did not perform to their expectations and had to manage their frustration to be have optimal mind states for their other events. Coping strategies included focussing on the other opportunities to medal, live the negative emotions to let them go, and focussing on the following competitions to prove one's real value.

Altogether, the aforementioned themes and subthemes touched impactful factors that interacted and led to the Olympic podium for the selected athletes. The interactions are complex, multiple and within each theme and subtheme. For example, having high and optimal levels of confidence permitted to establish and believe in clear and high goals during the Olympic Games. Getting to the next round of qualification meant that the athletes had to overcome distractions and had to use specific strategies to finish among the firsts of their heat. Such strategies were

sometimes created and adapted with the support of the athletes' coach(es) where a close and positive relationship allowed for adapted strategies and support to the athletes. When passing to the next round, the athletes' confidence was enhanced and their belief in their chance of medaling increased with every success performance in the qualifications. The athletes' focus on the process rather than the outcome permitted such achievement up to their final performance that led to one or multiple Olympic medals. Poor performances also happened for Hamelin and St-Gelais who competed in multiple events at each of their Olympics. Coping strategies were needed for both successful and poor performances to re-establish an optimal mind state for competing. Intrinsic motivation to execute their best performance seemed to have been the greatest source of motivation that lead the athletes to the Olympic podium. Finally, the aforementioned themes and subthemes reflected the main factors that influence the four incredible Québec athletes' performances.

### **To the post-Games: Reintegrating into the society**

Once athletes have lived the isolation and the high created by the Olympic Games, they then go back to their "regular" season, usually with the World Cup circuit and/or the World Championships. The meta-transition *To the post-Games: Reintegrating into the society* includes the debrief about athletes' Olympic experiences and learnings, planning for the future, and finishing their regular season. However, additional demands such as media interviews are required for athletes because of their status as Olympians. From this transition, the following themes were created: 1) Fulfilling immediate demands after the Games, and 2) Reflecting on one's performances at the Games while turning focus on the rest of the season.

**Fulfilling immediate demands after the Games.** The post-Olympic period played and impactful role for the athletes transition out of the Olympic Games. Once the Olympics are done,

medallists usually choose to do media tours to discuss their experiences at the Games. They also usually get invited for recognition by other sport events such as during hockey games from the NHL or baseball games from the MLB. The subthemes identified in this theme are: 1) Media tour after the Olympic Games and national recognition, and 2) Back to “normal” life and relaxed time.

***Media tour after the Olympic Games and national recognition.*** Because the athletes sometimes had competitions coming up soon after the Olympics, usually around the middle of March, the media tour did not start until the end of those competitions, at the end of the month. St-Gelais and Kingsbury discussed different experiences during their end of the season media tours from which they both shared positive feelings and memories, even though it was exhausting.

St-Gelais mentioned how she believed that the interviews and the media tour were demanding but also part of the athletes’ job: “C'est certain que ça fait beaucoup en même temps, mais j'estime que ça fait partie du travail d'une athlète. Personnellement, ça ne me dérange pas du tout, même que j'adore ça” (Tremblay, 2010, p. 35). / “It is true that it makes a lot at the same time, but I believe that it is part of an athlete’s job. Personally, I really don’t mind it, even that I love it”. In her first Olympics in 2010 and at 20 years old, St-Gelais medalled in both races she was qualified for, exceeding her own expectations. Going from media event to media event to share her story of success and receive congratulations and acknowledgments must have been a great experience, which would explain St-Gelais’ interests for media tours. It is usually when athletes are successful (i.e., winning one or multiple medals) at the Olympic Games that they are invited by different media outlets, but this does not necessarily mean that athletes are satisfied

with their performance. In this case, doing a media tour and having to discuss poor performances could be unpleasant.

The chance to participate in television shows, however, can be useful to get greater recognition. Kingsbury was invited to a popular television show from Québec where guests are welcomed to take part in discussions about their sport accomplishments in relation to current topics. Kingsbury shared how he had enjoyed the experience and how that program created even more social interaction with the public: “L'expérience est vraiment extraordinaire. [...] Cette émission occasionne beaucoup de messages sur les médias sociaux” (Leclerc, 2014a, p. 44). / “The experience is really extraordinary [...] This program leads to plenty of messages on social media”. The recognition and messages generated from participating in that television show appeared to be beneficial for Kingsbury. The visibility could have been beneficial for his sponsors and thus for him, and it could also have been a way for Kingsbury to share his passion for his sport and maybe inspire youth to follow his path.

Medalling at the Olympic Games also implies being recognised and acknowledged by local professional teams and their fans. For example, after winning a silver medal in the 2014 Olympics, Kingsbury, among other athletes, was invited to be presented and acknowledged on the ice before a game of the Montréal Canadiens from the National Hockey League and on the field by the Toronto Blue Jays from the Major League Baseball. Both events also included a privileged access to the ice and field, and to the players. After those experiences, Kingsbury shared:

Quand 21 000 personnes crient pour toi, c'est vraiment un bon feeling. Nous étions très proches des joueurs du Canadien, mon équipe. J'ai donné un «high five» à Plekanec et à Budaj. Je me suis permis de crier aux joueurs «Let's go les boys!» et j'ai eu droit à des

clins d'oeil de leur part. Je connais bien mon baseball, mais depuis que les Expos sont partis, je connais moins bien les joueurs et les équipes. Je peux dire que je me suis retrouvé à deux mètres de Derek Jeter, des Yankees. (Leclerc, 2014a, pp. 44) /

When 21 000 people scream for you, it's really a good feeling. We were really close to the players of the Canadiens, my team. I gave a high five to Plekanec and Budaj. I permitted myself to scream to the players "Let's go boys!" and I got nods from them. [...] I know well my baseball, but since the Expos are gone, I don't know as well the players and teams. I can tell that at some point I was two meters away from Derek Jeter from the Yankees.

Having the chance to stand before that many people and being applauded is most certainly a great feeling and memory for Kingsbury. This post-Olympic process seems to be a way to get direct acknowledgment from the public that amateur athletes.

The ways the media tour was perceived influenced athletes' meta-transition out of the Olympics, where it helped when the process of meeting multiple media was enjoyed (as explicitly mentioned by St-Gelais, for example). The media tour and national recognition also represented an opportunity for greater visibility, hence, potential additional incomes. This subsection of the current meta-transition set the tone for the next season and Olympic cycle.

***Back to "normal" life and relaxed time.*** Once the Olympics and the rest of the season is over, athletes can finally relax and take time for themselves. St-Gelais and Hamelin both shared thoughts about this time off highlighting different aspects of and needs for this period. For St-Gelais, time off equalled going back to her family in her home town (i.e., Saint-Félicien) and enjoying time with her community. Discussing her plans for the period after the last phase of the season, which was the World Championships in 2010, St-Gelais shared: "Dès mon retour, ce sera

quelques jours à Montréal et ensuite je viens passer un bon trois semaines à Saint-Félicien, c'est certain" (Tremblay, 2010, p. 35). / "As soon as I come back, it will be a few days in Montréal and then I'll come for a good three weeks in Saint-Félicien, that's for sure". St-Gelais' certainty and excitement to go home to see her family shows how it is a reenergizing experience to go back to her home town amongst her family, especially after being away for most of the year. This break period also seems to be a way for St-Gelais to go back to a normal life, where trainings do not take up all of her time.

Hamelin, on the other hand, shared his excitement and need for time off. After the 2013-2014 season was finally over, Hamelin declared: "On est contents d'être en vacances. On souffle un peu" (Parent, 2014, p. 17). / "We are happy to be on vacation. We can rest a little". Hamelin, like all athletes, needed a rest period after a demanding season. This quote was obtained during an event organized by one of Hamelin's main sponsors, Red Bull, at the Red Bull Crashed Ice event (see Parent, 2014). This event is a race on an ice course with inclines, declines, and turns that multiple skaters have to complete at the same time as fast as possible. As a special guest, Hamelin and his brother had the chance to try the course for fun, just the two of them. Having the chance to do activities like this for fun seemed to help Hamelin feel on vacation and relaxed, like the other people participating in the event.

After the high of the Olympics, the athletes were finally able to rest and enjoy free time. Going in one's home town and doing different activities were shared to be needed. The athletes used this time to relaxed and enjoy doing other things than training to decompress, which was part of preparing for the following season.

**Reflecting on one's performances at the Games while turning focus on the rest of the season.** One crucial part of athletes' post-Olympic period is to reflect and debrief about their

experience at the Games so they can get as many insights out of this process as possible and improve for the next Olympics. However, athletes' seasons are not over right after the Olympics, which makes it necessary for them to change their focus towards the final competitions. The three subthemes that were identified within this period (i.e., meta-transition) are 1) Learning from the experience, 2) Choosing to continue or not for the next Olympic cycle, and 3) Redefining motivation to compete after the high of the Olympics.

*Learning from the experience.* No matter the success achieved during the Olympics, all athletes had to overcome challenges to reach the podium. The experience gained from a first participation, and sometimes second or third, appeared to be highly valuable to them. One's first Olympics is a great source of learning about the general Olympic context. The experience gained at the Games can then be applied during a following participation, four years later. Kingsbury shared this thought after the end of the 2013-2014 season, when he said that he learned a lot during the Sochi Games which prepared him for the following Olympics in PyeongChang: "Je suis fier de ce que j'ai fait. J'ai vraiment pris beaucoup d'expérience et je vais être encore meilleur lors des prochains Jeux olympiques, en 2018" (Leclerc, 2014b, p. 45). / "I am proud of what I have done. I really gained a lot of experience and I will be even better during the next Olympic Games, in 2018". Kingsbury's gain in confidence was shown when he said he would do better in the next Games than what he did at the Sochi Olympics, which implies winning the Olympic gold as he won the silver medal during his first participation. Now that he knew what to expect from the Olympic environment, he could prepare even more specifically for the special demands of the Games.

Learning about one's capacities was also discussed as a learning experience at the Games. During the 2010 Olympics, and after two bad performances on the 1000-metre and the

1500-metre where he was unable to reach the podium, Hamelin kept his focus on the task at hand for the last two distances (i.e., 500-metre and 5000-metre relay). Thinking back to the moment before performing in those last two events, Hamelin mentioned: “Une chance que je ne me suis pas découragé avant, parce que j'ai gagné deux médailles d'or en 30 minutes. C'était le plus beau jour de ma carrière” (Arcand, 2014, p. S5). / “Good thing I didn't get discouraged before, because I won two gold medals in 30 minutes. It was the nicest day of my career”. From his participation in the 2010 Olympics, Hamelin learned about himself and his capacity to bounce back after a poor performance. This learning is important because it increased Hamelin's confidence, which could then be applied in any other competition, especially because it was coming from such an important and stressful competition.

Finally, the failures faced by athletes who have multiple chances to medal at the Olympics ended up being a considerable source of learning. Failures or poor performances have been highlighted by St-Gelais as being the greatest learning opportunities. Reflecting back at her performances a month after the 2014 Olympics, St-Gelais mentioned how mistakes are insightful teachers: “Ça prend de mauvais coups pour grandir. C'est ça qui forge les grands athlètes. Ça été révélateur aussi pour moi et ça va nous permettre de rebondir” (Potvin, 2014, p. 40). / “It takes bad performances to grow. That's what builds great athletes. It has also been insightful for me and it will permit us [with Hamelin] to bounce back”. St-Gelais' words refer to learning from their mistakes so they would not be reproduced. This way, athletes should know how to react when facing similar situations that lead to those poor performances.

Reflecting on the learnings from success, mistakes, and from the Games in general was mentioned to be one important step to take after the Games. Doing so lead to better preparation for the following Games, knowing what to expect. This was important because it fostered better



results on more consistent basis in the following competitions right after the Olympics (e.g., World Championships) or during the following season.

*Choosing to continue or not for the next Olympic cycle.* The featured athletes have chosen at some point in their careers to continue to train for the following Olympic Games, but interestingly enough, they mostly knew they wanted to keep training for the next Olympics soon after the closing ceremony of the Games they were participating in, or even before. For example, on the day of the closing ceremony of the 2006 Olympics, Hamelin was thrilled by his experience and mentioned wanting to keep exploring his potential in skating: “Moi, ce sont mes premiers Jeux. Quand je regarde des gars de même, ça me donne juste le goût de continuer et de voir jusqu'où le patin peut me mener” (Drouin, 2006, p. S3). / “Me, they are my first Olympics. When I look at those kinds of guys [teammates], it just makes me want to continue and see where skating can bring me”. Even though he did not explicitly state he would participate in the next Olympics, Hamelin’s words inferred that he wanted to keep developing as a skater.

Athletes’ results at the Games might also have driven the decision to continue for another Olympic cycle. Kingsbury’s goal to win the Olympic gold medal was not achieved at the Sochi Olympics, and he knew he wanted to keep going for another Olympic cycle. Only a few days after his performance at the Sochi Games (which was at the beginning of the Games), Kingsbury shared: “Le meilleur est encore à venir... Je veux gagner l'or olympique en 2018!” (Kingsbury & Leclerc, 2014, p. 35). / “The best is yet to come... I want to win the Olympic gold in 2018!” Not having achieved his ultimate goal of winning the Olympic gold medal was enough motivation for Kingsbury to want to train for the following Olympics. St-Gelais’ disappointment with her performances at the 2014 Olympics also highlighted this aspect, wanting to continue because of

dissatisfaction. In March 2014, St-Gelais that as soon as the Games ended she knew she wanted to pursue another Olympic cycle:

Après les Jeux, j'étais sûre que je continuais. Je ne terminerai certainement pas ma carrière sur des Jeux olympiques comme ça. Je prends ça une année à la fois dans le sens qu'on ne sait jamais ce qui peut se passer, mais mon objectif, c'est de continuer pour quatre ans et essayer d'y aller pour Pyeongchang. (DA, 2014, p. 35) /

After the Games, I was sure that was continuing. I will certainly not end my career with such Olympic Games. I take it one year at the time meaning that we never know what could happen, but my goal, it's to keep going for four years and try to go for PyeongChang.

St-Gelais' words suggest that such low results could not reflect the end of her career, and that she had to continue and strive for better. St-Gelais' experience and wisdom are also seen when she acknowledges a specific uncertainty that is present in sport, which athletes have to deal with. Such uncertainties, including injuries, could deprive her from a spot on the Olympic team, and this consciousness may have helped her better prepare for her goal. Additionally, this quote supports the idea that sometimes athletes know right after the Games if they want to continue for another Olympic cycle.

Deciding early after or even during the Olympic about continuing for another Olympic cycle was frequently mentioned by the athletes. Their goals for continuing must have been clear in their mind and they knew that they still had potential to stay amongst the best athletes of their disciplines. The early decision to start the next Olympic cycle helped keep or create a momentum in keeping training hard for the following seasons.

***Redefining motivation to compete after the high of the Olympics.*** The four athletes shared many strategies to stay focused for the last competition(s) after the Olympics. They mentioned using dissatisfaction from the Games as a way to motivate themselves, redefining their intrinsic motivations to compete after the huge “high” of the Games, using the crowd as a source of motivation, and using opponents and competition as a means of giving their best effort until the end of the season. The use of dissatisfaction to stay motivated was mainly shared by St-Gelais and Hamelin in relation to the 2014 Olympics. St-Gelais was not able to medal in any of the three individual events she took part in, but won a silver medal at the relay, while Hamelin won one gold medal over three individual races and did not finish on the podium for the relay. St-Gelais shared the importance of finishing the season strong after such disappointment of her performances at the Olympics:

C'est certain qu'il y a quand même un peu de colère. La détermination et le chien viennent un peu de ce que j'ai laissé sur la glace à Sotchi. Oui c'est une revanche en quelque sorte. Je n'utilise pas ce mot parce que je trouve que ça fait trop négatif. Honnêtement, je le fais vraiment pour moi, pour bien finir la saison et ne pas avoir un burnout. (Ainsley, 2014, p.35) /

There is some anger for sure. The determination and motivation come a little bit from what I left on the ice in Sochi. Yes, it's somewhat a revenge. [...] Honestly, I really do it for myself, to end the season well and not have a burnout.

St-Gelais channeled her anger for a productive outcome using determination and motivation for the rest of the season. She wanted to prove that she could do better than what she accomplished in Sochi. She seemed to have been seriously disappointed by her performance because she said that she needed to finish strong or otherwise she would undergo a burnout from her unsatisfying

results in two important competitions back to back. Her motivation to achieve successful performances, thus, partly came from the dissatisfaction with her previous results at the 2014 Games. Another interesting element from St-Gelais' discourse relates to mental health and the potential burnout that could have come from another poor performance. She implied that a burnout could happen if after putting so much work into her trainings for so many years she would continue to gain such low results such as at the Olympics.

Dufour-Lapointe, on the other hand, seems to have been affected by the low or post-Olympic depression that sometimes comes after the Olympics, but which she overcame. During a World Cup event in early March 2014, Dufour-Lapointe shared difficulties she faced when starting the competition and how she used the crowd to find her motivation and finish with the gold medal. After the competition, Dufour-Lapointe said:

J'étais très fatiguée et j'ai eu certaines difficultés à l'entraînement, a dit Justine. [...] La partie supérieure du parcours est très technique. Il y a de la neige molle et de grosses bosses, et les réceptions sont abruptes, donc très rapides. Mais quand j'ai vu la foule, qui est légendaire au Japon, ça m'a fait sourire. Ça m'a donné l'énergie dont j'avais besoin, ça m'a fait réaliser que je n'étais pas venue jusqu'ici pour rien! Ça m'a aidée à me concentrer et m'a permis d'exécuter une excellente descente. (La Presse Canadienne, 2014d, p. 44) / I was really tired and I had some difficulties in training. [...] But when I saw the crowd, which is legendary in Japan, it made me smile. It gave me the energy I needed, it made me realize that I didn't come all the way here for nothing! It helped me focus and execute an excellent run.

Dufour-Lapointe's exhaustion after coming from the Games almost got the best of her. Her motivation was also altered because she might have felt accomplished from winning the Olympic

Gold medal, the dream of any athlete, and had little motivation to perform well in a simple World Cup event. It is as if she had questioned her participation in this competition before realizing, with the help of the crowd, that she had other goals to conquer. Her mental strength was shown by the come-back she accomplished when finally winning that competition.

One last source of motivation to keep competing at one's best after the Olympics was mentioned by Kingsbury. His competition with Bilodeau to be the best mogul skier was his source of motivation. He wanted to be number one after finishing second at the Olympics. After being the official winner of the overall World Cup circuit and being awarded with the Crystal Globes for the best freestyle and moguls skier of the season, Kingsbury declared:

Le fait de gagner les Globes de cristal, c'est parce que j'ai fini la saison vraiment en force.

À chaque année, c'est mon objectif de remporter les Globes. J'étais motivé de les remporter, même avec l'année olympique. Surtout que j'avais une bataille à finir avec Alexandre. Il était devant moi avant les JO et j'ai réussi à le rattraper. Ce fut très serré jusqu'à la fin. (Leclerc, 2014b, p. 45) /

Winning the Crystal Globes, it's because I really ended the season strong. Every year, it is my goal to win the Globes. I was motivated to win them, even with the Olympic year. Especially that I had a battle to finish with Alexander [Bilodeau]. He was ahead of me before the Olympic Games and I was able to catch up with him. It has been tight until the end.

Kingsbury had incredible will to always strive to be the number one skier every year. Bilodeau's last season offered Kingsbury a great rivalry that lasted until the last competition of that season (i.e., 2013-2014). Kingsbury seemed to have been able to channel his strong ego motivation in positive and successful performances and outcomes, rather than choking. This proved to be one

of his greatest abilities. Kingsbury used the results from the Games, finishing second behind Bilodeau, as a source of motivation for this not to happen again. He had a “battle to finish” with Bilodeau, from which he won the last round. Kingsbury’s desire for revenge was so strong that it helped him finish the season stronger.

The four athletes sometimes used dissatisfaction from their Olympic performances or the will to finish first and beat their opponent to prove their value as motivation strategies for the competitions that followed the Olympics. Dufour-Lapointe, on the other hand, had to find motivation in competing in smaller events after winning the gold medal in the most important competition of her sport (i.e., Olympic Games). The need to redefine motivation after the Games was thus decisive for the success in the following competitions. Various sources of motivation (e.g., ego, extrinsic, intrinsic) seemed to have helped the athletes reach the podium in those competitions.

Finally, the different themes and subthemes of this meta-transition highlighted the post-Olympic processes. Their interactions and outcome of those interactions dictated the type of transition they experienced. Enjoying the media tour and using it to one’s benefit, such as to attract potential sponsors made it easier to leave the high of the Games. Reflecting back on one’s Olympic performances helped getting ready for the following Games and be more competitive for the competitions that closed the season. Choosing early to be part of the next Olympic cycle may have helped enjoying the media tour because athletes knew what they wanted and could be honest with the journalists about their next goals. The period of holiday at the end of the season helped changing and refreshing athletes’ minds and motivations to train, which led to easier transition to the following season.

## CHAPTER FIVE: Discussion

The purpose of this study was to discover what characteristics impacted the best Québec Olympians, how those factors impacted them in their Olympic journey(s), and establish recommendations that could be used by other Québec Olympic athletes and teams in relation to the three meta-transitions (i.e., Focused preparation for the Olympics: Developing skills and feelings of being at your top, To the Olympic podium: Managing the magnitude of the Games, To the post-Games: Reintegrating into the society). The current study explored the Olympic experience(s) of four Québec athletes (i.e., Charles Hamelin, Marianne St-Gelais, Justine Dufour-Lapointe, and Mikaël Kingsbury) using media data. To answer the research questions, inductive thematic analysis was used (see Braun et al., 2016). The following discussion explores the findings of the study in relation to the current literature about meta-transitions and Olympic performances. The current chapter pertains to the three aforementioned meta-transitions and the various themes they covered.

### **Focused preparation for the Olympics: Developing skills and feelings of being at your top**

The meta-transition *Focus preparation for the Olympics* pertained to the athletes' preparation once they were qualified for the Olympics. It included the themes *Building self-confidence during races and competitions* and *Establishing best practices*. These will be discussed in relation to their different subthemes and the literature.

**Building self-confidence during races and competitions.** The athletes used previous accomplishments, victories, and comebacks to enhance their confidence. Studies from Jones and colleagues (2002, 2007) suggested that athletes' confidence, in general, comes from past experiences and accomplishments, which the current study confirmed specifically in relation to athletes' preparation for the Olympics. Indeed, the athletes of the current study provided

examples that their past successes (e.g., medalling), comebacks, doing good in difficult weather conditions, and reaching the podium in important competitions helped build their confidence in their preparation for the Olympics. All the overcame set-backs and challenges during the preparation period served of point of reference for the athletes. Those comebacks could then later be relied on giving the athletes the belief and confidence that they can overcome other challenges when facing adversity. This suggests the need and usefulness of challenges that permit the athletes to raise their game and learn about their potential. A study from Hays et al. (2007) presented different types of confidence that were linked to the athletes' beliefs in their ability to accomplish different skills and to produce certain outcomes. The results of the current study confirmed the use of those types of confidence by the Québec athletes. The confidence from the ability to accomplish different skills was shown when Kingsbury discussed his great performance even though the weather conditions were bad. The confidence from knowing one can produce a certain outcome was seen when Kingsbury was able to win the 2013 World Championships after having heard Bilodeau's high score which brought him the conviction that he could perform at his best when the implications were very important. Having produced a certain result in the past was also linked to knowing it could be produced in the future like for Hamelin remembering his past successes in Asia and believing he could reproduce those results.

Another aspect that helped the Québec athletes' confidence was their positive relationship with their coach. Olusoga et al. (2012) found that when getting close to the Olympics, coaches sometimes do more for the athletes to ease their life. This could be interpreted in the current study when Dufour-Lapointe totally relied on her coaches' game plan during a World Cup event close to the Olympics, or when Hamelin discussed following his coach's training schedule to the letter showing a complete trust towards his coach. The



importance of establishing trusting coach-athlete relationships has been previously highlighted (see Jowett & Cockerill, 2003), but not necessarily in relation to the Olympic preparation. What the results of the current study showed was that a trusting and positive coach-athlete relationship fostered athletes' success which enhanced the coach-athlete bond. The coach-athlete relationships shared by the athletes of the current study also suggested that they were successful and effective ones, which Jowett (2005) respectively described as leading to normative performance successes (e.g., winning a gold medal in major sport events) and being aimed at the positive development of the athletes (e.g., holistic relationships leading to positive interactions). The Québec athletes' words all suggested that such relationships were already developed during the Olympic preparation, which helped them on other aspects of their sports (e.g., more accomplishments, enhancement of confidence from podiums). Hence, the preparation phase was not the time to start building a coach-athlete relationship but its level of trust and closeness may reflect how strong the relationship will be during the Olympics.

The Québec athletes' early qualification seemed to also have empowered their confidence level. They shared feeling more relaxed and being able to enjoy competitions because of not having to think about the outcome. The benefits from having had an early Olympic selection do not seem to have been previously explored in details in the literature. However, having a late selection has been highlighted to leading to poor performances as early as 1986 (see Orlick & Partington, 1986; 1987). What the current results suggest is that the early Olympic selection provided additional time to prepare, deal with the anxiety, and slowly bring the focus towards the Olympics, which could not be accomplished the same way when a late selection would occur. Schinke et al. (2015) mentioned, in their psychological support plan for the Canadian Olympic Boxing Team, that athletes who would have had late selections meaning being selected four

months before the Rio Olympics, rather than an early selection represented by a selection eight months before the Olympics, would “engage in discussion about resiliency and hope, followed by the augmentation of specific resilience skills, including disputing and de-catastrophizing” (p. 83), which highlights the augmented challenges for late qualifiers. Even though the Olympic selection processes differ between sport, it is interesting to note that both Dufour-Lapointe and Kingsbury experienced a “very early” selection for the Sochi Olympics, qualifying 11 and 12 months respectively prior to the Games. For the same Olympics, St-Gelais and Hamelin both qualified seven months before, which could also correspond to an early qualification (see table 2). Additionally, for the three Olympics included in the current study to which Hamelin participated in, his earliest qualification was for the 2010 Olympics where he qualified 11 months prior to the Games, which also correspond to the Olympics where he performed the better earning two gold medals and a fourth and seventh place. Specific studies about the time of Olympic qualification and the results at the Games should be conveyed to better know the relationship between the time of Olympic qualification and one’s results at the Games.

**Establishing best practices.** The second aspect of the first meta-transition related to the establishment of one’s best practices. The Québec athletes discussed reconsidering and/or creating patterns of success during their preparation for the Olympics. They noted what had worked in the past for them and were reproducing and refining their strategies such as leading the race from start to finish for Hamelin. In the preparation of the Canadian Olympic boxers, Schinke et al. (2015) suggested the boxers to focus on moments in their career where they had accomplished high levels of success in major competitions, to reconsider patterns that led to the successful performances in relation to plans, focus, warm-up routine, and attitude. This relates exactly to what the Québec athletes did during their Olympic preparation. The athletes of the

current study mentioned having done a similar analysis but not necessarily on a conscious level as suggested by Schinke et al (2015). The results seemed to have produced the expected outcomes of highlighting what the athletes did that permitted them to reach the podium in major competitions, which could eventually be used during the Olympics. Interestingly, this strategy is far from new because Orlick and Partington (1986; 1987) have found that among other elements that impacted the best Canadian athletes during the Olympics was the establishment of winning patterns in training. However, the results of the current study add to the knowledge by highlighting the use of this strategy in the preparation phase before the Olympics rather than only during the Olympics.

The development of resiliency and learning from one's mistakes were other key aspects in the Québec athletes' preparation. They refined their resiliency skills in competitions when it did not go their way and made sure to learn from their errors to avoid reproducing them again. Fletcher and Sarkar (2012) supported that Olympic champions have had periods in their career where they had to face lots of pressure and strengthen their resiliency skills. However, what the literature did not seem to show was resiliency continually being developed in the Olympic preparation phase, where it seemed to be even more impactful according to the Québec athletes. It is like if bouncing back after poor performances during the Olympic year permitted to rely on those comebacks and develop a confidence in one's abilities to keep fighting when pressured, because of its time proximity with the Olympics. Fletcher and Sarkar (2012) added that the Olympic champions shared that it was their past lived adversities that permitted them to enhance their resiliency skills, which stressed the beneficial role of counter performances as learning opportunities. Studies on mental toughness also suggested that mentally tough athletes had adaptability skills that permitted to work through obstacles (Jones et al, 2002; 2007), referencing

to resiliency, which related to the Québec athletes' experiences. Learning from mistakes in the preparation period for the Olympics seemed to be the basis for elite athletes always seeking to refine their skills and technics.

The last aspect of the establishment of best practices related to the use of goal setting. The Québec athletes shared having goals (e.g., short and long-term goals) for the regular season of the Olympic year (i.e., competitions before the Olympics), for the Olympics, and for the competitions after the Games. The athletes' focus was thus not only on the Olympics but on the different steps leading to that life changing competition. Having long-term goals and prioritising them over short terms goals has been found to help athletes' motivation in training and competitions (Gould et al., 2002a; Jones et al., 2007). However, what the Québec athletes mentioned was setting goals specifically in relation to their entire season and the competitions they took part of. This process allowed them to focus on the process (focus on task at hand), thus on the different steps of their preparation for the Olympics. This finding is interesting because it highlights that those Québec athletes did not focus solely on the Olympics but wanted to be successful in all the competitions they took part of.

### **To the Olympic podium: Managing the Magnitude of the Games**

The second meta-transition pertained to the Olympic Games themselves. This meta-transition included the five following themes: 1) Having clear goals for the Olympics, 2) Facing and managing the distractions of the Games, 3) Building self-confidence during the Games, 4) Having and following performance and mental plans and strategies, and 5) Managing the immediate results at the Games. These themes are discussed in relation to their respective subthemes and the literature.

**Having clear goals for the Olympics.** Jones et al. (2007) found that mentally tough athletes set realistic and challenging outcome goals and when the podium is aimed for it is because the athletes know they can reach it. St-Gelais' quote saying she was aiming for the top eight at her first Olympics in 2010 suggested that she did not firmly believe she could have reached the podium during her first Games and having said out loud she was aiming for an Olympic medal could have been counterproductive for her. Setting too high goals could also have played against Hamelin explaining why he revised his goals to be more realistic after restating his goals for the 2014 Olympics from wanting to win a medal in all four events he was going to participate in, to medaling in at least one individual event and at the relay. On the other hand, Kingsbury had a very high goal of winning the Olympic gold medal and was convinced that he had the potential to battle for that position. Having this goal permitted him to finish second at his first Olympics in 2014.

The literature highlighted the importance of having outcome goals (Jones et al., 2007). However, there are other kinds of goals such as performance and process goals (see Weinberg & Gould, 2007) that should be used by athletes. Process goals should actually be the focus during a performance to allow a focus on the task (Weinberg & Gould, 2007). Interestingly, the Québec athletes mentioned at many occasions having "satisfaction" goals which I defined as aiming at doing the best performance which, when achieved, led to feelings of satisfaction no matter the outcome. This seemed to have been a goal present in the athletes' minds because they knew that they had no control over their opponents' performances and that accomplishing their very best performance still included a chance to be surpassed by others. Additionally, such satisfaction goals allowed to bring the focus back on the process goals also created by the athletes and highlighted in the literature as being crucial for optimal performances (Jones et al., 2007;

Schinke et al., 2015). The Québec athletes also believed, except for St-Gelais at her first Olympics, that their best performances could have led them to the podium, which they accomplished.

**Facing and managing the distractions of the Games.** The Québec athletes mentioned many sources of distraction at the Olympics. The most important one probably being the magnitude of the Games for first time Olympians. For example, Kingsbury had a hard time sleeping during the 2014 Olympics, a problem he never had to face during any other competitions before. Another one was meeting professional athletes and celebrities such as when Kingsbury met Sidney Crosby (NHL player), one of his idols. Those distractions have been previously highlighted in the literature (see Blumenstein & Lidor, 2008; Fletcher & Sarkar, 2012; Schinke et al., 2015). Other distractions shared by the Québec athletes seemed less common and included having family members/partners competing with the athletes (for St-Gelais and Hamelin) and informal roles to play during the Olympics (role of leader for Hamelin after participating in multiple Olympics). Interestingly, however, Dufour-Lapointe also had family competing in the Games where her two sisters participated in the same event as her during the Sochi Olympics but did not discuss in relation to her Olympic experience. Having a partner or family members seemed to have only affected Hamelin and St-Gelais, which infers that additional preparation could have been done with them to better manage this personal distraction. Hence, the support staff members should have made sure to individualized the Olympic preparation to the athletes' specific situation and needs for the athletes to be able to face them during the Games.

The coping strategies used by the Québec athletes included to divide bigger tasks into smaller ones, use teammates' support and experience, and bringing some sort of lucky charms to

the Olympics. Indeed, Moyle (2015) found that because unexpected challenges always arise during the Games, athletes, teams, and coaches have to have developed effective resiliency and coping skills. Studies have also highlighted the use of similar strategies by Olympians from other countries. Those strategies included imagery, self-talk, focussing attention, relaxation, and goal setting (Blumenstein & Lidor, 2007; Shannon et al., 2012). Therefore, the strategies shared by the Québec athletes did not stand out from what was found within the literature.

**Building self-confidence during the Games.** The first aspect of self-confidence during the Games referred to athletes' belief in their own abilities. During the Olympics, athletes have many reasons to be stressed such as worrying if all their efforts invested for so many years will pay off (Hodge & Hermansson, 2007). Mentally tough and successful athletes are able to deal with such pressure because they have high levels of confidence (Jones et al., 2007). Other researchers also found the important role of self-confidence in elite athletes' performance (Gould et al., 2002b; 2002c). The Québec athletes showed proof of their high level of confidence by executing incredible performances leading to the Olympic podium. Additionally, St-Gelais mentioned during her first Olympics that she believed she had the abilities to win an Olympic medal but was not necessarily aiming for one. This is interesting because it supposed that her self-confidence was not that high. Similar findings were brought up by Fletcher and Sarkar (2012) who found that some Olympic champions mentioned having high level of self-confidence while others mentioned having lower levels of self-confidence, but all of them won a gold medal at the Olympics. Hamelin brought up the notion of optimal confidence level rather than having the highest level of confidence as possible. Indeed, the relationship between confidence and performance has been referred to an inverted U where the highest point is slightly to the right and where too much or not enough confidence could harm athletes' performances (see Weinberg

& Gould, 2007). For Hamelin, winning an Olympic medal necessitated to have an optimal level of confidence which needed to be balanced with the right level stress. It is worth noting that each athlete has their own personal optimal level of confidence (Weinberg & Gould, 2007), which was also exemplified in the current research where the athletes had very different levels of confidence, from moderate for St-Gelais to very high for Kingsbury, leading to their Olympic successes.

The second aspect about confidence during the Games for the Québec athletes related to the coach-athlete relationship. The positive and trustful coach-athlete relationship that was built during the athletes' career and maintained in the preparation for and during the Olympics, permitted the athletes to perform at their best. For example, Hamelin had been reassured so many times by his coach that his instinct during a race was good that he was able to trust it and know when to pass his opponents leading to a gold medal in the 1500-metre race during the Sochi Olympics. Even though there are no evidence of the direct impact of the coach-athlete relationship on performance accomplishments it is seen as including positive interpersonal qualities (Jowett, 2003), which could lead to better performances. On the other hand, Greenleaf et al., (2001) found that coach issues negatively impacted U.S. Olympians. This suggests that positive coach-athlete relationships may contribute to the athletes' peace of mind and optimal performances.

**Having and following performance and mental plans and strategies.** The Québec athletes shared the relevance of having both performance and mental strategies for the Olympic Games. The performance strategies were elaborated for each race and permitted to optimize one's performances. Having such game plans was also found by Orlick and Partington (1986). What was shared as important by the Québec athletes was to first have those strategies, then



follow them, and finally adapt them during the races. The inability to adapt one's strategy to the progress of the race led to poor performances as shared by Hamelin who started his 1000-metre race too fast in Vancouver 2010 because he could not hear his opponents behind him because of the extremely loud crowd. This made him exhausted before the of the race. Indeed, the ability to tactically adjust was found in the literature to positively impact Olympic performances (Gould et al., 2002b).

The mental plans and strategies referred mainly to motivation in general and to refocusing strategies. St-Gelais shared the need to refocus after falling in a previous individual qualification for an upcoming relay qualification. The crucial role of the ability to focus and refocus goes along with the literature (see Gould & Maynard, 2009; Jones et al., 2007). Other researchers also found the positive result for Olympic champions to focus on the process rather than on the outcome and to turn their sport focus on and off as they wished (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2012). Hamelin discussed using external motivation (i.e., energy from the crowd) before the Vancouver Olympics but did not have a good beginning of competition, while Dufour-Lapointe shared using intrinsic motivation from a key sentence she repeated to herself before winning the gold medal in the Sochi Olympics. It was mentioned by certain authors (see Weinberg & Gould, 2007) that extrinsic motivation can undermine intrinsic motivation which could have been part of Hamelin's struggles at the beginning of Vancouver's Games. Thus, intrinsic motivation should be privileged over extrinsic motivation during the Olympics.

**Managing the immediate results at the Games.** Managing one results at the Games had different impacts depending on how many events the athletes participated in. Athletes could have reached or not their goals in different events they took part of and had to deal with it to be ready for the following ones. Attaining the Olympic podium was shared as being such an

accomplishment that the four Québec athletes had a hard time believing what they had accomplished, as shared by Dufour-Lapointe when interviewed just a few minutes after her gold medal performance in the Sochi Olympics. St-Gelais mentioned that winning an Olympic medal included being recognized and acknowledged by other athletes in the village, including professional athletes. However, for St-Gelais and Hamelin who had multiple events and chances to medal throughout the Olympic Games, they had to manage their happiness or disappointment, from where the need of having strong focus and refocus abilities (Gould & Maynard, 2009). Hence, the disappointment experienced by the four Québec athletes referred to the speed skaters and specific events where they thought they could have medalled but did not. Their coping strategies included to focus on the next event, to live the emotions of disappointment rather than suppress them, and to focus on the upcoming competition to prove one's real value.

### **To the post-Games: Reintegrating into the society**

The third and last meta-transition pertained to the post-Olympic period, which included two themes: 1) Fulfilling immediate demands after the Games, and 2) Reflecting on one's performances at the Games while turning focus on the rest of the season. These themes are discussed in relation to their individual sub-themes and the literature.

**Fulfilling immediate demands after the Games.** This theme included two aspects of the post-Olympic period, which were doing a media tour and going back to normal life, training, and eventually to relaxed time. The Québec athletes shared having enjoyed the media tour where enjoyment made it easier to do even though exhausting and being excited to eventually have a pause from training (after the end of the season) and go back to their hometown to see their family. Stambulova et al. (2012) highlighted that "Olympic winners", being athletes who medaled at the Games, usually take a break after the Olympics to rest and recover, and to meet

with the media and fans, which confirmed that the Québec athletes have similar needs and obligations than any other Olympians after the Games.

**Reflecting on one's performances at the Games while turning focus on the rest of the season.** This theme included three aspects of the post-Olympic period. The first one was about learning from the experience. The second aspect referred to the decision to continue for another Olympic cycle or choose another orientation. The third one referred to reorienting the focus towards the end of the season.

The Québec athletes mentioned reflecting back on and having learned from their Olympic experience. For example, St-Gelais stressed how valuable teachings mistakes can offer in relation to her disappointing performances at the Sochi Olympics. Even though not mentioned by the Québec athletes, Olympians usually participate in Olympic debriefs with their coach and sport and support staff members (e.g., sport psychology consultant) within a month or two after the Olympics (see AASP, 2012; Gould et al., 2001) and was highlighted as a crucial step by certain researchers who studied Olympic champions (Jackson, Mayocchi, & Dover, 1998). It is during this process that athletes record what went well and what should be done differently for an eventual other participation in the Olympics (AASP, 2012). Such post-Olympic debriefs have been shown to facilitate the transition towards the athletes' next step or goal (McArdle et al, 2014). The fact that the Québec athletes shared having reflected on their performances could have been because they had already done a debrief or because their natural willingness to improve and be the best pushed them to want to learn from their experience with the hope to do better next time.

The Québec athletes all chose to continue for another Olympic cycle during the Games or soon after their Olympic performances. The athletes included in the current project all decided to

continue to the following Games for the three Olympics explored in the current study (Torino 2006, Vancouver 2010, and Sochi 2014; see also table 1). Even though not explored within the current study, the four Québec athletes also participated in the PyeongChang Olympics. Only Dufour-Lapointe, after Sochi, was at first not as clear and open about wanting to participate in the following Olympics, which she ended up doing and won the silver medal. Elite athletes do not always get to choose when their career ends (see Taylor & Lavalle, 2010). Fortunately, the Québec athletes were able to make their own decision and all of them chose to keep going to the next Olympics, which led Charles Hamelin to his fourth Olympic Games, Marianne St-Gelais to her third, and Justine Dufour-Lapointe and Mikaël Kingsbury to their second Olympics in PyeongChang 2018.

The Québec athletes used different motivational strategies to move their focus on the rest of their season after the Olympics. They focused on proving their abilities in the following competitions and on their desire to win the overall ranking of the season to stay motivated. Blumenstein & Lidor (2008) mentioned that as sport psychology practitioners they led a recovery phase after the Olympics that was related to “recovering from the extreme emotional, physical, and psychological efforts they [athletes] had invested during the Olympics” (p. 298), which seemed to reflect Dufour-Lapointe’s low motivation to perform in the World Cup event following the Sochi Olympics. Gordin and Henschen (2012) also found that after achieving one’s life-time goal such as winning the Olympic gold medal for Dufour-Lapointe, athletes sometimes experienced a void that the researchers referred to as the “wedding depression” from not having other goals to focus on. Additional work maybe should have been done with a sport psychology consultant for Dufour-Lapointe to feel readier for continuing to compete right after the Olympics. However, because the Québec athletes all knew they wanted to compete in the

following Olympics early on, except for Dufour-Lapointe, they may have been able to avoid this wedding depression and keep high levels of motivation to train and compete.

In conclusion, the athletes shared interesting experiences about their Olympic journeys. Some aspects of their experiences were similar to what had already been highlighted in the literature, while others represented interesting and different findings. First, the key findings in relation to the Québec athletes' preparation to the Olympics related to the positive impact on the athletes of having a solid coach-athlete relationship which helped reduce the athletes' worries in their Olympic preparation, the establishment of goals for the pre-Olympic competitions that permitted the athletes to stay focused and motivated in their sport, the strategy of starting in the first rounds of a competition slower or easier and finishing faster and with more complex manoeuvres, and learning from one's mistakes. Second, what came out from the Olympic performance period included the ways the athletes started their performances easy to finish strong, the positive impact of their relationships with their coach, the challenging goals they had set for the Olympics, and the use of intrinsic motivation to perform at their best. Third, the main findings of the post-Game period included consciously learning from their experience, having high goals for the rest of the season, and using intrinsic motivation and the desire to be the best to stay focused on their performances. The aforementioned findings are described in the next chapter, the conclusion.

The newspaper articles have been a great source of data that permitted to get a direct access to the Québec athletes' words during specific periods of their Olympic journeys. After reading all the articles, I felt like I better understood their experiences before, during, and after the Olympic Games through the interviews with the different journalists. The variety of the interviewers also provided a variety of data which enriched the study. However, because I did

not conduct the interviews, I was not able to address specific topics that the athletes did not mention to the journalists. I would have been curious to learn more about the athletes' perspectives of their relationship to their province and country, and the usefulness of sport psychology support during their Olympic journey. I would have wanted to ask how they felt their Québec culture might have influence for the best or the worse their Olympic experiences and how they felt about their Québec versus Canadian pride. Thus, the media data used in the current study included limitations in relation to the data that was collected.

## **CHAPTER SIX: Conclusion**

The objective of the current study was to extend the knowledge about Olympic performances for the most successful and recent Québec athletes from individual winter sports. The research questions that led this project were: 1) What are the characteristics impacting the performance of Québec Olympic medalists moving into, during, and out of the Olympic Games and how do they influence the athletes' performances? 2) How can these characteristics be used to help improve the athletes' performances? The summary of the findings in relation to both research questions are presented next.

### **Summary of the Findings**

In regards to the first questions, the study has permitted to identify several characteristics that helped or impaired with the athletes' performances within the three meta-transitions (i.e., Focused preparation for the Olympics: Developing skills and feelings of being at your top, To the Olympic podium: Managing the magnitude of the Games, To the post-Games: Reintegrating into the society). The main findings are summed in seven main points: 1) Developing an empowering coach-athlete relationship in order to facilitate the athletes' performances, 2) Starting a competition easy to finish strong, 3) Creating realistic but challenging goals for every step of the Olympic season, 4) Consciously learning from success and failures/mistakes, 5) Using mainly intrinsic motivation when competing, 6) The unmentioned importance of sport psychology services, and 7) The omission of information about provincial versus national pride. To respond to the second research question focussing on a more practical aspect of Olympic performances, the conclusions are followed by implications detailing their significance, recommendations highlighting suggestions about what athletes should do to enhance their performances during their Olympic journeys, and finally applications describing how to apply

the recommendations. The conclusion six and seven are linked to the methodology of the project and are therefore not discussed in relation to the meta-transitions.

**Conclusion one: Developing an empowering coach-athlete relationship in order to facilitate the athletes' performances.** The coach-athlete relationship played a crucial role in the athletes' performances in both the preparation for and performance at the Games. When positive and based on trust, the coach athlete-relationship permitted the athletes to reduce the distractions they faced because the coach took care of them, which fostered better performances by the athletes. The less the athletes had to think about in training and competition settings, the more they could focus on the tasks at hand of practicing and competing in their sport.

**Implications.** This finding is crucial because elite sport is about maximizing all the small aspects of performance to get an edge. More importantly is that the coach-athlete relationship has been shown to have a great potential of impact on athletes' well-being (see Jowett, 2005). Additionally, a positive impact on athletes can make a noteworthy advantage according to the athletes of the current study. Athletes and coaches should therefore work together in establishing the best relationship possible as they would all benefit from it. Athletes' results could be enhanced for which coaches could take part of the credit, giving them a better reputation and potentially more coaching opportunities.

**Recommendations.** Different approaches could be used to build a favorable coach-athlete relationship. I believe that coaches and athletes should have a professional relationship but that they should also extend it on a more personal level, such as taking part of a team building exercises with the athletes (Gould et al., 2002c). The personal relationship would permit to deepen the connexion and better know and understand each other's thinking and behavioral processes permitting to better adjust to one another. Coaches and athletes could build their



relationship from the 3+1 C's from Jowett's (see Jowett, Kanakoglou, & Passmore, 2012) approach (i.e., closeness, commitment, complementarity, coorientation). However, users of this model should keep in mind that its efficiency has not been validated for elite athletes and coaches. Another aspect in relation to the preparation would be to explore how the coach and the athlete react in more stressful settings such as during the World Championships so they would both know what to expect from each other during the Olympic Games.

***Applications.*** Coaches and athletes have to go through the normal process of getting to know each other when they first meet, discuss their goals and individual ways of working and training and evaluate the best ways to work together. However, this is usually done before the preparation period for the Olympics. In relation to the Olympic preparation phase, the athlete and coach should discuss the ways they work best. The athlete should mention their needs during competitions and how they like to be interacted with during stressful situations. Then, coaches and athletes should participate in activities out of the regular sport context to learn more about each other and develop a more personal relationship. Such activities could include dinners with their immediate families or recreational activities like going for walks or camping. During the Olympics, coaches should try to help their athletes as much as possible. Such involvement would include providing the athlete with the training, eating, traveling, and competition schedules. Finally, maintaining a good relationship would also include efficient and positive communication between the coach and the athletes during the Games.

**Conclusion two: Starting a competition easy and finishing strong.** The athletes used the different steps of a competition to develop their confidence and perform harder and/or faster performances at each round of the competitions. The athletes started with easier runs and slower pace in the first round of qualification and increased the complexity and pace of their runs and

intensity of their skating every round once they felt more comfortable, up until the final where they pushed their limits a little more and they gave their everything. This strategy was shared to be executed in the competitions before and at the Olympics. Being a strategy that worked for the athletes, they must also use that strategy in competitions following the Games, in the third meta-transition, but it was not mentioned. The athletes shared that they there was no need to take unnecessary risks in the first rounds of a competitions but still needed to perform to a certain standard to get to the next round. They were strategic in the results they wanted to obtain in the qualifications because those results dictated their position (being among the last skiers to perform or being in the inside of the skating track to get the edge in the first turn) in the final rounds of the competitions. Thus, the athletes did what was necessary to get an advantage for the final but did not want to do too much and take avoidable risks.

***Implications.*** This finding is meaningful because those well recognized athletes shared that it was not always about dominating others. The main focus was actually about making one's way up to the final round with an edge, when possible. This strategy is important because to get to the final the athletes have to go through multiple rounds of qualification where physical and mental fatigue accumulate. Managing this energy expenditure is crucial for the athletes to feel as strong and fresh as possible during the ultimate round, the final. Additionally, the risks of fatigue and injuries is greater when the athletes push their limits, which should be limited.

***Recommendations.*** Athletes should follow the aforementioned advice by having clear plans prior to a competition about the strategies they want to use but keeping in mind the need to adapt those strategies to the flow of the competition. This can be done by the athletes and their support team analysing the opponents' warm up to have an idea of what they are planning to do. A discussion between the athletes and the support team should then take place to adapt the

strategies to what was noticed and have multiple plans of action that athletes could follow for the progress of the races and runs. This way, the athletes would hopefully be ready to react quickly to any scenario, enhancing their chance of performing well. The Olympic preparation includes great opportunities to test different strategies and how much athletes can hold in to still pass to the next round and being among the best athletes to get the position advantages. The best strategies established in the preparation phase would be used during the Olympics, keeping in mind the need to adapt the strategies to the progress of the competitions.

***Application.*** The execution of the intervention would necessitate the work of multiple professionals from the integrated support staff who could provide different viewpoints on what usually needs to be done to pass to the next round during a competition. For example, the coach could discuss the times and/or scores needed at each round, the sport psychology consultant could discuss the mental approach to not giving one's full effort, and a nutritionist could evaluate the food necessary to eat between each rounds to foster the best performance possible.

**Conclusion three: Creating realistic but challenging goals for every step of the Olympic season.** This conclusion pertains to the three meta-transitions discussed in this project. The athletes had set precise, realistic, and challenging goals for all the steps of the Olympic year. Their goals pertained to the competitions before the Games, to the actual Olympic Games, and to the competitions following the Olympics. Goal setting enabled the athletes to be focused on each step at the time, leading them to know what they wanted to achieve in their Olympic journey. Having clear goals also allowed the athletes to know early on after or even during the Games that they wanted to keep training for another Olympic cycle and orient their energy and focus towards that objective.

***Implications.*** Goal setting was important because it directed the athletes' energy towards the achievement of specific steps during the Olympic season, resulting in being in the present moment and achieving their goals. Goal setting should be done every season and objectives should be reviewed and adapted regularly (e.g., weekly, monthly) during the Olympic year. Goal setting in the preparation phase would help athletes to focus on one step at the time and on the process. The goals should be about the outcomes aimed at during the competitions but should also include other ones touching the process that leads to the outcome. For example, an athlete could aim at winning a World Cup event but could also have different score goals for each of the runs (skiing) and/or position goals (skiing and skating) for each of the races during the multiple rounds of the competition. Reviewing one's goal also permitted to personalized them and create goals that were meaningful to the individual.

***Recommendations.*** Goal setting should be done by the athletes with the help of their coach. Support staff member (e.g., sport psychology consultant) could also be included to help establish specific, measurable, realistic, and challenging goals. In the Olympic preparation, examples of goals that athletes should establish are goals relating to placing to a specific rank in competitions such as World Cup events, mastering specific skills, and reaching a new personal best time in a race. The goals during the Olympic Games should pertain to a specific outcome (e.g., podium) and be complemented of goals about the process during their actual performances such as starting strong and fast at the start signal, staying among the two fastest athletes per heat, etc. Finally, goals in the post-Game meta-transition should focus on the following competitions and include both outcome and process goals as described for the other meta-transitions.

***Applications.*** Goal setting sessions could be conducted with all the athletes of the team which would facilitate the coach's involvement with all the athletes individually. Reviewing the

goals could be initiated by the coach after each competition to reflect on the short-term goals (e.g., what was achieved) and whether or not the long-term goals should be adapted. Group or individual sessions could be conducted for the purpose of reviewing the goals, when needed. These could be done for the Olympic preparation and post-Games period. During the Games, the number of goals should be minimized to decrease the element the athletes have to think about and should focus on the process rather than on the outcome.

**Conclusion four: Consciously learning from success and failures/mistakes.** Dealing with successes and failures, the athletes consciously reflected and learned from their experiences to improve, which allowed to develop better resiliency skills. This was done in the preparation for the Olympics and post-Olympic phases. Reflexivity permitted to avoid repeating the same mistakes and develop strong solutions to deal with challenges. Doing so in the Olympic preparation phase permitted the athletes to arrive ready with many tools at their disposal to face the Olympic Games, while reflecting on their Olympic performances after the Games also allowed to gain insights on what worked or what to change for a future participation at the Olympics.

**Implications.** The conscious reflection and learning processes played a crucial role for the athletes because they permitted to avoid repeating the same mistakes and develop their skills and strategies, development that would not be as efficient if not done consciously. This is important because without a conscious reflection in the preparation phase athletes would not optimize their results which could jeopardize their chances to qualify for the Olympics. This process is also important after the Games so the athletes would retain as much information about their unique experiences and be able to use them in the future.

**Recommendations.** What should be done by athletes is to take a moment after each training, performance, an Olympic Games to analyse what worked and how the performances were accomplished to learn from them and establish their best practices. This could be enriched with the participation of the coach and other support staff members' opinions. Similar reflection processes should be taken in the Olympic preparation than in the post-Olympic phase.

**Applications.** Support staff members could film the athlete during training and competition settings of the preparation phase which could then be discussed according to the results obtained. The discussion with different professionals with the athletes and coaches about the recordings would allow for a variety of perceptions to be shared which would maximize the potential output of the evaluation. The coach could also ask the athlete to provide a reflection sheet where the athlete would have to write down what the learnings were from a specific training or competition to foster the athlete's active reflection and introspection. After the Games, the athletes should definitely participate in debrief sessions where they would discuss their Olympic experience including what they liked and did not like, and what worked well and what could be done differently.

**Conclusion five: Using mainly intrinsic motivation when competing.** Using intrinsic sources of motivation seemed to also have been an impacting factor mainly during and after the Olympic Games. Extrinsic motivation such as using the energy from the crowd was mentioned at many occasions, which was also mentioned by U.S. Olympians as helping performance in a study by Greenleaf et al. (2001). However, the Québec athletes accounts did not support an obvious positive impact on their performances, as intrinsic motivation did.

**Implications.** This conclusion is interesting because the Québec athletes seemed convinced that they benefited from extrinsic motivation and might have made a priority to make

sure to be exposed to it by, for example, attending the opening ceremony and being cheered for even though the athletes had competitions early the next morning compromising their sleep.

Intrinsic motivation has been highlighted in the literature as being more efficient in sport (Weinberg & Gould, 2007) and should then be prioritized.

***Recommendations.*** Athletes should find and develop their intrinsic motivation to practice their sport, including for training and competing. Intrinsic motivation strategies and self-talk could also be practiced right before a performance, like Justine Dufour-Lapointe did during the Sochi Olympics repeating her key sentence to “own the moment” and want to execute the best performance possible for herself.

***Applications.*** Key words or key sentences could be constructed by the athletes with the support of their coach and their sport psychology consultant so that they are powerful and strong for the athletes. Sport psychology consultant could lead workshops to find the best key words for every athlete. In the workshops, the athletes would be asked to reflect on the reasons why they pursue their athletic career and find or create personal reasons to do so.

**Conclusion six: The unmentioned importance of sport psychology services.** Because of the nature of the Olympic Games being the most demanding sport events, I expected the athletes to discussed the role of sport psychology consultant within the three meta-transitions explore in this study. No athletes actually commented on the support they received from those professionals. This was a surprising finding as it is now common for elite athletes to use their services. Various reasons could explain why the Québec athletes did not discuss sport psychology services. Even though it was getting common, it might not have been seen as positive or normal to use the services of a sport psychology consultant a few years ago. The data related to periods of time from 2005 to 2014, which corresponds to the emergence of the

profession of sport psychology with elite athletes. Nowadays, all elite teams include the services of a sport psychology consultant. Another reason for the athletes not to have mentioned the support of sport psychology consultant could be because of a fear of being seen as needing help or having mental problem. A negative connotation might have been associated to requiring such services which could have made the athlete avoid mentioning it. Lastly, the athletes might simply not have used sport psychology services during their Olympic journey. Even though unlikely, this hypothesis could be possible. According to several newspapers (see Bergeron, 2014; Drouin, 2014d), Kingsbury started using sport psychology services after the Sochi Olympics and did not use them before because of the fear of getting his mindset changed for the worse. Kingsbury thought that sport psychology was for athletes with mental problems. Once he learned more about what sport psychology actually was, he became interested and started to like working on this aspect of his sport.

**Conclusion seven: The omission of information about provincial versus national pride.** Within the current research I expect to explore the athletes' relationship with the province of Québec because of its unique history. Statistics Canada (2013) presented that citizens from the province of Québec were significantly less proud to be Canadian than the national reference. Seventy percent of Québec residents mentioned being proud of being Canadian while the national reference was 87%. The separation movement within the province and the low national pride shared by numerous journalists and citizen made me think that maybe the athletes would feel the same, meaning that they would feel a pride of being Quebecer that would conflict with the Canadian representation. However, no direct information was mentioned by the athletes about that aspect. This could be the case for multiple reasons. First, the data used in the current study were journalists' interviews with the athletes. Because the athletes knew that anything they



would mention would become public and associated to them, and because their major funding came from the Canadian Olympic program called Own the Podium, it would not have made sense for them mention such statements in front of the media. Another approach to collecting information could have been more suitable to explore this aspect, such as interviews with a guaranteed anonymity where athletes could have express themselves freely on the national versus provincial pride and association without any fear of potential negative repercussion. Second, the athletes, being international athletes have been representing Canada for many years and might have develop a more profound feeling of attachment towards the country over their provincial attachment. Wearing the Canadian colours and hearing the Canadian national anthem at every competition might also contribute to athletes' development of Canadian pride.

### **Limitations and Future Research Directions**

This section pertains to limitations and future research ideas that could be explored to continue expand the knowledge around Olympic performance and subcultures. Limitations of the current study are presented, followed by research ideas. The main limitation that has to be acknowledged within the current study pertains to the type of data used. Indeed, the information highlighted by the media at the detriment of other information has been shown to established what people understand and remember about a phenomenon, which refers to the “framing” phenomenon (Entman, 1993). Indeed, the journalists decided what they presented and not presented from their interviews with the athletes in their final newspaper articles that I have used in the study. The use interviews for future research would counter the present limitation giving a direct access to the athletes' words, without any additional filter. However, the usefulness of the outcome of using media data seems greater than its limitations as it allows for profitable insights. The use of media data also represents a strength of the current study as it gave access to valuable

overtime data with Olympians who would otherwise not have been possible to contact by a researcher (researchers cannot receive accreditations during the Olympic Games to interview the athletes!) because of multiple problems including ethical considerations of potentially disturbing the athletes for example. Indeed, using media forms (e.g., newspapers, documentaries, blogs) in applied practices opens up learning opportunities about the athletes' successes, struggles, strategies, which proved the tremendous usefulness of media data in sport psychology research. Applied recommendation can be established from the use of media data as it was the case in the present study. Other media forms (e.g., films, athletes' own self-stories on Instagram, Facebook, or Twitter) would be other great sources of data for applied research and practice, opening up windows into learning about athletes' successes and failures across a variety of aspects (e.g., mental skills, mental health issues) raising awareness on the not sometimes challenges lives of athletes.

Many suggestions for future research can be highlighted. First, a study including a greater number of athletes would be needed to find out what athletes from a subculture could experiment differently from the broader culture. Even though the goal would not be to identify how all of the athletes from one subculture experience a major world event such as the Olympics, it would permit to find a greater variety of characteristics highlighted by multiple athletes. Second, comparison between different subcultures from one main culture (e.g., francophones, anglophones in Canada) would also further permit to highlight distinctiveness from which individualized services could be created. The data collection process would need to be adapted for obtaining this information. Semi-structured or conversational interviews would be effective data collections methods to get to know the athletes' personal experiences in major sport events and the impact of their subculture within their sport practice. Third, comparisons between

athletes from a same subculture but with different levels of success, for instance comparing the factors impacting Olympic performance by an athlete having won multiple Olympic medals and one not having won an Olympic medal could allow to discover differences leading to success or not at the Olympics.

### **Concluding Remarks**

In conclusion, this study has provided the identification of several characteristics having impacted four of the best recent Québec athletes during their Olympic journey(s). Those characteristics permitted to create recommendations that should be considered by other athletes, coaches, and teams from Québec when preparing for the Olympic Games to foster successful performances. Researchers should explore more in depth the potential impact of subcultures on athletes' sport experiences to personalized the services offered to elite athletes.

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## Appendix A

Courriel Laurentian University - Publicly available information for thesis

2017-10-16, 12)53 PM



Jacob Dupuis Latour <jdupuis\_latour@laurentian.ca>

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### Publicly available information for thesis

6 messages

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**Jacob Dupuis Latour** <jdupuis\_latour@laurentian.ca>  
À : rlander@laurentian.ca

16 octobre 2017 à 09 h 11

Hi Dr. Langer,

My name is Jacob Dupuis-Latour and I am a second year Master's in Human Kinetics student. I will use publicly available information for my thesis and was wondering if a letter of exemption from the Ethic Board is needed for me to start collecting my data.

Thank you for your time,

Jacob

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Jacob Dupuis-Latour, Hons. B.A. Master's student.  
School of Human Kinetics | École des sciences de l'activité physique  
Laurentian University | Université Laurentienne

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**Rosanna Langer** <rlander@laurentian.ca>  
À : JDupuis\_Latour@g.laurentian.ca

16 octobre 2017 à 10 h 08

Hello,  
Your information is a little too vague for me to determine what you are referring to. Please provide additional detail.  
thanks,

Sincerely,  
Rosanna Langer

Rosanna Langer, PH.D.  
Chair, Laurentian University Research Ethics Board  
Associate Professor,  
Dept. of Law and Justice  
Laurentian University  
[935 Ramsey Lake Rd.](#)  
[Sudbury, ON P3E 2C6](#)  
Tel: 705.675.1151 ext.4333  
E-mail: [RLanger@laurentian.ca](mailto:RLanger@laurentian.ca)

>>> Jacob Dupuis Latour <jdupuis\_latour@laurentian.ca> 16/10/2017 9:11 AM >>>  
[Texte des messages précédents masqué]

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**Jacob Dupuis Latour** <jdupuis\_latour@laurentian.ca>  
À : Rosanna Langer <rlander@laurentian.ca>

16 octobre 2017 à 10 h 33

Hi Dr. Langer,

Sorry for the vague information. My project will examine what are the factors contributing to the success of Québec Olympic medalists moving into, during, and after successive major world events such as Olympic Games or World Championships. I will be using newspaper (i.e., Le Devoir, Le Journal de Montréal, La Presse) and website (i.e., Radio-Canada and RDS [Sport channel]) articles from journalists who have interviewed the athletes, as data. The newspapers I will be using are from Québec and the data base (Bibliothèque et Archives Nationales du Québec) used to find the articles is free to all Québec resident (which I am). The website articles are open to everyone.

Please let me know if more information is needed.

Sincerely,  
Jacob

[Texte des messages précédents masqué]

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**Rosanna Langer** <rlanger@laurentian.ca>

16 octobre 2017 à 10 h 52

À : JDupuis\_Latour@g.laurentian.ca, Laurentian Ethics <Ethics@laurentian.ca>

Hello again,

No this is fine, and thank you for providing more background. No REB review is required for this type of research. No "clearance" or "exemption" is required either.

sincerely,  
R Langer

Rosanna Langer, PH.D.  
Chair, Laurentian University Research Ethics Board,  
Associate Professor,  
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